



Vision and Commitment 2018
A year to focus on discipleship

Every day, in
everything
&
everywhere

Discipleship Series Youth - Speaking Up (Testifying)

Key message

Jesus demonstrated that speaking up for what we believe in can make us unpopular and can sometimes even be dangerous. Breaking religious, social and cultural norms cost Jesus his life. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we can speak the word of God boldly, stand firm against opposition and, whatever the circumstances, we can be filled with courage to stand up for and be proud of our faith.

Key Scriptures

Matthew 21:12-17, Acts 4:31 and 1 Peter 3:15

Resources

- Bibles - or print outs of the Scripture passages
- Pens/paper
- A device on which you can watch YouTube videos

Welcome

Any kind of game that gets your group 'speaking up' would be great to start this session. You could use the classic board game of Taboo or Balderdash.

Alternatively, try the following:

Before the session prepare some cards with a variety of topics written on them. These topics could be simple things such as 'plants', animals' 'space' 'my family', or more complicated or humorous themes such as 'how to tackle global warming', 'how volcanoes erupt', 'what happened when I went to Africa', 'why my dog is called Ruby' 'my favourite shoes'! You can be as serious or as crazy as you like.

In turn, each group member takes a card and has two minutes in which they must talk without hesitating about the topic on the card. The content of what they say doesn't really matter much, as long as it is coherent, but they must keep talking for the whole two minutes. They can gain a maximum of ten points, but they lose a point for every hesitation and every 'um' or 'er' that they say! If they can't say anything that makes sense, or talk for less than two minutes, then they do not get any points!





Word 1. Jesus Clears the Temple

a) Read:

‘Jesus went into the Temple and threw out all the people who were buying and selling there. He turned over the tables of those who were exchanging different kinds of money, and he upset the benches of those who were selling doves. Jesus said to all the people there, “It is written in the Scriptures, ‘My Temple will be called a house for prayer.’ But you are changing it into a ‘hideout for robbers.’”

The blind and crippled people came to Jesus in the Temple, and he healed them. The leading priests and the teachers of the law saw that Jesus was doing wonderful things and that the children were praising him in the Temple, saying, “Praise to the Son of David.” All these things made the priests and the teachers of the law very angry.

They asked Jesus, “Do you hear the things these children are saying?” Jesus answered, “Yes. Haven’t you read in the Scriptures, ‘You have taught children and babies to sing praises?’” Then Jesus left and went out of the city to Bethany, where he spent the night.’ (Matthew 21:12-17 NCV)

b) Group discussion

- What/who was it that made Jesus angry?
- What was the outcome of Jesus’ outburst?
- Why is this sort of anger OK?
- What other examples in the Bible can you think of when someone displayed ‘righteous anger’? (e.g. Moses, when he came down the mountain and found the people worshipping the golden calf (Exodus 32:1-20). David, at Goliath’s taunts against Israel and their God (1 Samuel 17). Paul when he learned that some of the Christians in Galatia were embracing the false teaching. The whole letter of Paul to the Galatians is white hot with Paul’s expressed anger and outrage. Nehemiah, upset after learning about the wealthy Israelites’ exploitation of the poor (Nehemiah 5:6).)
- How did the priest and temple leaders react to Jesus’ actions? Why?
- What do you think happened next in the temple courtyard - after Jesus had left?

c) Draw a colourful angry emoji on a large sheet of paper. Ask the group what people/things going on in our world today make them angry. Write these on the sheet of paper around the emoji.

- What makes you angry - for the right reasons?
- Have you ever felt so angry about something that was going on against God that you wanted to smash things up?! What was it? What did you do?





Vision and Commitment 2018
A year to focus on discipleship

Every day, in
everything
&
everywhere

- Do you speak up when you see people being taken advantage of or mistreated, or see/hear God's name being dishonoured in anyway?

d) Use any of the following thoughts during your group discussion as you find helpful.

The passage in Matthew was written at the time Jewish people from all over the Roman world were coming to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Passover and to present offerings in the temple. People travelling from afar often found it more convenient to buy their offerings once they arrived at the temple. And so, the temple area was well-stocked with animals and birds to be purchased by these pilgrims, but they were being sold at very high prices, taking advantage of those who had travelled. The money changers exchanged all international currency for the special temple coins - the only money the sellers would accept. They often deceived foreigners who didn't know the exchange rates. You can imagine what this did to the temple. It turned it into a market-place. There would be buyers and sellers dashing back and forth. There would be hand-trucks and animal carts rolling all around. There would be lines and lines of impatient people, and crowds pressing at tables to get the best deals. And there would very likely have been the kind of language filling the air that characterises the trading of goods and money even today. And of course, there would be profits being made. In short, the temple was being used as a place for people to further their own selfish agendas, taking advantage of others, rather than a place in which to offer sincere worship to a holy God. And this made Jesus mad!

What happened after Jesus threw those moneychangers from the Temple? Probably there was a shocked silence as people awkwardly waited to see what would happen next. The Bible tells us that the blind and the lame came to him, and children recognised him as the son of David. Immediately after Jesus dealt with the opportunists, he became a magnet for the very ones whom others had so often take advantage of. It may be that when we take a courageous stand for righteousness, some will recognise and appreciate that stand. The world is full of downtrodden people who are looking for someone to stand up for them. If we don't do it, who will? If anger is nowhere on your radar, you might need to ask yourself why it isn't! That anger can be a great catalyst to getting us involved in causes we would otherwise ignore.

Word 2. Sharing our faith

a) Read:

'After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.' (Acts 4:31 NIV)

'Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy.' (1 Peter 3:15 MSG)





Vision and Commitment 2018
A year to focus on discipleship

Every day, in
everything
&
everywhere

b) Split into three smaller groups. Give each small group one of the following Bible passages to read and to think about how the person coped with being in a situation where the people around them did not share their faith. Consider:

- Was the person open about having a different faith?
- How did they relate to the people around them?
- Did they stay true to their faith?
- How might this story be relevant to you in school, college or the workplace?

Passages:

- Acts 17:16-34
- Daniel 1:1-21
- Esther 2:1-3:6; 7:1-10 (As the Esther passage is longest, give that to the most able group or the one with the most background Bible knowledge.)

Get the groups to summarise their Bible passage to everyone else and then feedback their answers to the questions above. Discuss the different approaches to sharing our faith.

- Paul talked about God but he did it in language that the Athenians understood. He used examples from their culture. He pointed out where they were religious and searching for God. He left them intrigued and wanting to know more, rather than feeling that he had to explain everything in one go. With your friends, you might need to be a 'Paul' using films or music as springboards to talking about faith.
- Daniel was plunged into an alien culture and was taught the ways of the Babylonians. He went along with most of what he was being taught. He learnt it all so well that he gave better answers than the Babylonians themselves. But he and his friends felt there was one thing that they were being asked to do that was too much - to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols as part of the Babylonian's worship. They took a stand, but did it in such a way that showed that God's ways were better.
- Esther didn't own up to being a Jew. She kept quiet about her faith and was just the same as everyone around her. But when the time came she did stand up for justice and saved her people. She was prepared to speak out.

So there are different models for being a Christian in situations where you are surrounded by people and a culture that doesn't share your faith. Discuss these with the group:

- How might they apply to the situations that they face at school, college or work?
- Which would be the easiest one to do? Esther's may seem the easiest - until it came to 'crunch time'.

Point out that that was right for her, but we need to pray and ask God for his wisdom to know how to act.

(Adapted from <https://www.energize.uk.net/meeting-plans/486>).





Vision and Commitment 2018
A year to focus on discipleship

Every day, in
everything
&
everywhere

Action

Jesus said that we're bound to face opposition for following him but that we should be pleased because of it (Matthew 5). We may not get beaten or put into jail for being a Christian today as the early Christians did, but we can't expect everyone to react favourably when we share our faith in Jesus; some people may be jealous, afraid or threatened. We can expect some negative reactions, but remember Paul's words to a young Timothy? God's spirit is not one of fear, but of strength and boldness and confidence (slightly paraphrased from 2 Timothy 1:7!).

1. Ask the group members if they find telling others about Jesus and their faith hard. What things do they find particularly tough? What difficulties and challenges do they face sharing Jesus with others? For example: people making fun of you for being a Christian, feeling too scared to tell your friends that you go to church, not wanting to stand up for someone at school who is being bullied, struggling to live in a way that is pleasing to God due to pressures from friends, needing to stay honest in sports, academic work or social situations.

Split into pairs and ask them to discuss the situations they find difficult. Then have each pair share their experiences with the whole group, giving space for them to encourage each other to stay strong and be bold in speaking up about their faith and relationship with God.

2. Watch the following video on YouTube:

How can we be bolder

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYE-zt115L8>

Allow the group time to comment on what they have seen. How does this inspire you to speak out for Jesus and fill you with boldness and courage?!

For a longer video watch the following:

Fatima in Saudi Arabia

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-t2VG-QMTo&t>





Vision and Commitment 2018
A year to focus on discipleship

Every day, in
everything
&
everywhere

Prayer

'But the Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power. Then you will tell everyone about me in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and everywhere in the world.' (Acts 1:8 CEV)

'After they had prayed, the meeting place shook. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and bravely spoke God's message.' (Acts 4:31 CEV)

Jesus promised the disciples they would receive power to witness after they had been filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). The Holy Spirit's power is given to us to help us share the love of Jesus with those around us.

Discuss some practical ways that the Holy Spirit helps us to do this, e.g. using powerful confident words, doing miracles, knowing to say just the right thing at the right time, having a 'word of knowledge' for someone (knowing something about them/their situation that you couldn't possibly have known apart from the Holy Spirit), having a generous, patient and serving heart towards someone to be able to help them in a practical way.

Pray for each other to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to receive power, strength, courage and to 'bravely speak God's message'.

Any of the following songs may be suitable for your time of prayer and worship.

Courageous by Casting Crowns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkM-gDcmJeM>

Give Us Your Courage by Tim Hughes

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xL7MW_NPTBQ

You Make Me Brave by Bethel Music

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_UglO7SGUWk

