

Trading Fear for Love

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I am a witnessing wimp. I have never viewed “evangelism” as being one of my spiritual gifts. Does that excuse me from my calling to be salt and light in the workplace? Absolutely not. I have been challenged for years to carry out my calling as I wrongly tip the hat toward the fear of man. I *do* have a burden for the lost, but to be an overt witness without seeming contrived or unnatural...this is my particular struggle.



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I have little problem with the things that are less overt: I don't curse or take the Lord's name in vain, I try to be honest and fair in all my dealings, and I readily own up to church involvement. When I am asked directly about my faith, I rejoice because I feel free to share from the heart when another person is giving me clear entry to do so. In my job, I network frequently among a community of hundreds of CEOs, CFOs, lawyers, financiers, and the like, and I've always tried to be authentic and interested in the real things of life versus engaging in empty talk so that, hopefully, people will open up and converse on subjects that might veer into spiritual matters.

My industry values and rewards the one who will stop at nothing to “get the deal,” so I am learning what it means to be different for the sake of the Gospel. How am I to behave in an environment where I am not only competing against our company's competitors, but also with my own colleagues? I have been directly challenged in this area time after time, and it can get ugly. It is an interesting balance to strike between standing up for what is right and being a doormat. I have also been challenged to confess my failings publicly to colleagues when I feel my witness has been compromised by my actions. I have had fascinating responses to this, but after praying intensely beforehand that God would be glorified in my confessions, He has been faithful.

I often need to step back and be reminded of what is more weighty: getting a deal and being right, or yielding to a colleague because the relationship I may

have with that person is of greater import than getting credit for a deal. One outcome of such an action is that I have had a manager tell me that I am not “tough enough.” How do I express my decision without sounding sanctimonious? Oh, to be eloquent and have a response that not only gives understanding for my position but also serves to glorify God to my management and colleagues. I must admit to some need for growth in this area as well. But, I recall the words of Proverbs 16:7, reminding us that “when a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies live in peace with him.” I am in most times at peace with my colleagues—no small feat when one considers the serious grudges being held by so many within the sales ranks of my industry. One of my prayers is that the light of God's love would be on my countenance and be evident in my actions. Were it not for this prayer, I am certain that my selfish, prideful side would win.

In November last year, I had a unique opportunity to be a more public witness. Another C.S. Lewis Fellow, Casey Veatch ('00 Class), and I are part of a host committee that put on the very first High Tech Prayer Breakfast in the Washington metro area. The breakfast was modeled on a wonderfully successful ministry in Atlanta that has hosted such breakfasts for the past eleven years. The concept is simple: each host committee member invites 5-10 colleagues, influencers, or clients to a breakfast at the Ritz Carlton - Tysons Corner. A delicious breakfast is followed by networking and a very straightforward testimony by a local high tech “celebrity.” Next comes a talk by a nationally renowned business person.

As time approached for the breakfast, I joked with Casey that the event was doing an amazing thing: “smoking out” the Christians and pushing us far beyond our comfort zones. But, as the host committee issued its invitations, we were encouraged by the overall response to such an unusual networking event. People were intrigued and asked questions.

Was I quaking when I invited my colleagues and associates? Surprisingly, not as much as I thought. Have I had some measured, critical responses? Yes.

However, I was prepared to have some individuals reject this forum—and even me. But, I continued to stay in relationship with the “non-responders,” remembering that they just weren’t ready...yet.

I have to say that I was glad for something like this to take me beyond my own fears. My hope was that this event would point each attendee to Christ in a meaningful way.

At that time, I was reminded of a quote from Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia* where the lion, Aslan, says, “I am not safe, but I am good.” So it is with Christ as we follow His calling on our lives, particularly as lived out among those who reject Him. Our stand for Christ in the marketplace is definitely not “professionally safe.” He calls on His people to bear fruit, to be salt and light, to love unconditionally, to turn the other cheek...wow. Not a human recipe for success in the shark tank of business. But, we follow a good God who will, in the end, see us through potential rejection as we dispense with our fear of man and instead grow in the healthy fear of an infinitely good God.

As we focus on Jesus and turn away from our fears, He changes our hearts, helping us to feel what His heart feels: compassion for the lost, and a great desire to see that every lost soul finds the Good Shepherd. So I think of another lion in literature: the lion in *The*

Wizard of Oz. He wanted courage. In the end, it was love in his heart that gave him what he needed. Love in our heart for Jesus and for others will be the thing that gives us the courage we lack.

When the breakfast took place, the results were nothing short of amazing. It was profoundly evident that many of the over 300 people who came were starving for meaning in life, and in conversations afterwards even the most resistant of souls were saying that they had much to consider about eternity.

Another outcome of the breakfast was my personal sense of release from the fear I’ve had regarding openness about my faith. In the two days following the event, I had several conversations with those present at the breakfast as well as with other colleagues and clients, all talking about the context of the breakfast’s message. People’s openness to discussing matters further has been a tremendous encouragement to me. And, while some have refused further conversation on the matter, I no longer feel worried about the negative impact on my relationship with them. It has given me a greater passion to pray that they will, in time, come into the Kingdom.

Thank God for His patience with me. May His gift of holy boldness seasoned with love bring an ongoing fruitful journey for all who are part of His Kingdom.

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