

In the beginning - Sticking up for your faith 11

Aim of lesson

To help the young people to cope with the pressure of school or college, where they are probably expected by teachers and by their peers to say that they believe in evolution and not in creation. This is something that many young people find very hard, especially if they are shy and not very assertive.

Bible background

1 Peter 3:12-18, Matthew 10:29-34

Preparation required

This is largely a discussion lesson so it will depend a lot on how you are able to guide the young people to talk. If you are not in regular contact with the young people, or involved in school, you may like to talk the lesson over with someone else who is, and get their advice about how to handle it. Remember that this is ultimately something that the young people will have to work out for themselves, so it's not enough that you should tell them what to do - they need to have thought through what it means for them, and feel happy with what they have decided.

Suggested outline of lesson

Why should we stick up for our beliefs?

Ask the young people to think about this. Why not just go along with everyone else, and pretend that we think the same as they do even if we don't? If we keep quiet about our beliefs it becomes harder as time goes on. This increases the temptation to hide things, lie to friends, and compromise. It's really not possible to think one thing and say something else all the time. The danger is that if we fool other people about what we believe, we end up fooling ourselves as well.

We know and understand things that many others don't. They may laugh at us, but ultimately we know that they will have to learn that there is a God, and that he really did make this universe. So we have a responsibility to say so.

Why is it hard?

It's no good pretending that it's always easy to stand up for what we believe, particularly in a school environment where 'Bible bashers' can be the subject of ridicule and bullying. Get the young people to think about when it is difficult, and why.

You may like to consider the examples of men and women in Bible times who found it hard to stick up for their faith: Moses, Gideon, Jeremiah, ...

Reactions of their peers

- feeling inadequate
- being afraid of bullying
- worrying that they may lose their friends
- being embarrassed about the image of Christianity
- being unsure of your own beliefs
- being unsure that you could defend your own beliefs

Reactions of teachers

If a teacher believes in evolution and expects you to learn from him (or her), it is a challenge to their authority if we say that we don't believe what they are saying. How might they react:

- in class?
- when marking exams?

What might be the result of their marking? Get the young people to think this through. For instance, they might do less well in a science exam than otherwise. What could be the result of that? Is it all bad? For example, if they are led away from a career in a science subject that required them to believe in evolution, is that altogether a bad thing?

Illustrating the problem

Get the young people to script a dialogue to illustrate one or two of the problems they have identified.

What can we do about these problems?

Get the young people to look at the passage from 1 Peter 3. Is this describing the sort of situation we have been thinking about?

What to say in difficult situations

What does it say about the sort of answers we should give in difficult situations? Be ready, prepared. Is that always possible?

Think about Peter at Caiaphas' house, when he denied his Lord. How did he cope in a difficult situation? Do you think this might have been in the back of his mind when he wrote this? What could he have done that was different?

What can we do to be as prepared as we can?

Illustrating a better way

Now think through the problem dialogue(s) they have written, and consider what could be done in that situation to make it better. Rewrite the dialogue and act it out, or simply read it.

So we have just done what Peter tells us to do. Maybe we can do the same thing for other situations that might arise.

How to say it

What does Peter say about this? (speak with meekness and fear, or (NIV) gentleness and respect). You may also like to refer to 2 Timothy 2: 24-26.

Why should we do this?

- Because we don't know everything, so we should act and speak with humility.
- Because there is no point in putting other people's backs up.
- Because we are speaking for a God whose ways are far above ours.

What else? We should speak with confidence. If we are unsure of ourselves, our uncertainty communicates to other people and they are far more likely to laugh at us.

What makes this hard? If we ourselves are not clear about what we believe. So what can we do about that? Read the Bible, read other helpful books, pray for help.

What can we do (as opposed to say)?

The young people should think of answers such as:

- Choose your friends carefully.
- Bring them to CYC or whatever, so that at school you have got someone else who understands your point of view.
- Talk over beliefs or doubts with other young people so that you know where you stand.
- Go to helpful youth weekends, Bible talks, and so on.
- Realise that what the Bible has to offer is a thousand times better than anything your friends have got - so why not be a bit more confident?

What else?

What does Peter say in verse 12? Is that true of us as individuals? Does verse 13 mean what it says? Remember that Peter knew that he was going to be killed for his faith, and that many of God's people have been persecuted. So what does it mean?

Look at the passage from Matthew 10, and bring out the lessons that God knows about us, and that he understands that we find these things difficult. He also expects us to witness for what we believe.

Relevance to our lives

The way we deal with situations like this at school can set the pattern for the rest of our lives. We either learn to be open about our faith or we can become increasingly withdrawn and secretive. In the end it may determine whether we have a faith at all.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, help us to remember that if we are trying to please you, you will be with us and protect us. Help us, wherever we go, to be true to you and not to let you down. Amen.

Other suggestions for activities

You may like to turn the 'problem dialogue' into a play, or short series of sketches, dealing with some of the issues from this lesson and perhaps others as well.