

Course 3: Repentance

Favorite Psalms Part 5

Psalm 4:4-5

Messages Highlights:

The phrase “search your hearts and be silent” literally means “speak to yourself and be silent.” True repentance comes when the part of you that understands and loves the Word of God does the talking and the part of you that wants to justify itself shuts up and listens. It falls short because it’s meaningless. Nothing is at stake. Awe involves real fear, and fear comes when the stakes are high.

There comes a time when a child is no longer satisfied with pretend keys, phones, cars, babies, or guns. They grow out of fantasy and want to enter reality. They want to be involved in serious things that really matter. That hunger keeps growing and is never really satisfied until you become involved in eternal things.

If God is our refuge, what are we told to fear him? Why fear a refuge? Is God safe or dangerous? He is safe when you are running to Him and He is dangerous when you are running away from Him.

Psalm 4:1-8 For the director of music. With stringed instruments. A psalm of David. Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God (lit God of my righteousness). Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer. ² How long, O men, will you turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods? Selah ³ Know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the LORD will hear when I call to him. ⁴ In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Selah ⁵ Offer right sacrifices and trust in the LORD. ⁶ Many are asking, "Who can show us any good?" Let the light of your face shine upon us, O LORD. ⁷ You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound. ⁸ I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

Introduction

The last two weeks we have been studying Psalm four, where David shows us how to lead an unbeliever to God. The process we see in this psalm has four parts: 1) Go first to God. Make sure you are right with God before you worry about whether someone else is right with God. And doing that will give you both the compassion and the courage you need to share your faith. 2) Show them that the most important question is “What do you love?” You can tell what it is you love the most by what you are most pursuing in life. Make sure they understand that the essence of sin is failure to love God. 3) Talk to the person about how God compares to wind. Show them the emptiness of what they are pursuing. And now this morning we get to the fourth part: Call for repentance.

Five parts of repentance

The call to repentance comes in verses four and five.

⁴ Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Selah

⁵ Offer right sacrifices and trust in the LORD.

David tells them to do 5 things. 1. Tremble, 2. Turn, 3. Think, 4. Worship, 5. Trust

1. Tremble

The awesomeness of God

The NIV says “**be angry and do not sin,**” but that is not what the Hebrew says. The Hebrew says, “**Tremble and do not sin.**”¹

The attribute of God behind this is His awesomeness. We can tremble in awe before God only because God really is awesome – not in the cheesy, shallow sense that we call almost everything we like awesome in the colloquial slang of our culture where everything that is even slightly good is called awesome, but awesome in the sense of actually being the object of real, knee-buckling, pulse-quickenning *awe*.

God designed the human soul to need to be awed. There is an appetite within us to the sensation of being dwarfed and staggered by something far greater than us. That is why people spend thousands of dollars to visit Niagara Falls or the Alps. It is why movie screens are huge and it is worth it for Hollywood to spend millions on special effects. We have a huge appetite to be awed.

And nothing the world pursues can satisfy that appetite on the long term, because there is more to awe than spectacle. A great action movie is spectacular, but not awesome. It falls short of being awesome because it is meaningless. It is not serious business. It is just fantasyland. Part of the craving of the human soul is a craving for meaning and importance and reality. If you are raising children, one thing you will notice is there comes a time when they are suddenly no longer satisfied with a toy cell phone. They grow out of being satisfied with fantasy and start to desire reality. When our kids are really little they are happy with a toy lawnmower and plastic keys and pretend guns. But that doesn’t satisfy them for long. Pretty soon they start wanting to be a part of the real world. God designed your soul to want to be involved in serious things that really matter - to make decisions that have meaningful consequences - to make contributions that really matter – that make an important difference. And that hunger keeps growing and is never really satisfied until you become involved in eternal things.

So we need to show people that their lives are just a lot of playing around with a set of plastic keys. They might be the CEO of a major corporation or a top scientist, but if they are not involved in the Kingdom of God and are only dealing with temporal things and not eternal things, then they are doing nothing but pushing a fake, plastic lawnmower around the yard.

Only God is truly awesome – worthy of awe. Because in God alone is there both the staggering wonder of being dwarfed by immense, unfathomable greatness, as well as big time meaning and importance and significance.

Repentance happens in a person’s heart when that person begins to take God seriously. And a very large part of that involves fear. Because when you are dealing with important things, if they go wrong they have really, really bad consequences. If they did not they would not be that important.

¹ The idea of anger is introduced by the Greek translation, which Paul uses when he alludes to this passage in Ephesians four. (The NIV translators felt that since Paul quoted the Greek translation, that is what they would go with.) But the word “anger” is not in the Hebrew. It just says “tremble.” And the context is clear that David is not discussing anger here, but repentance. It is much more likely that what David meant was “tremble before God in fear and awe” not “tremble in anger.”

So it is scary business. When David calls them to tremble before God, he is calling them to fear Him. And you only tremble in fear before someone who is dangerous. Nobody trembles in fear before someone who is safe and who is no threat.

And that is why most people do not tremble before God. Most people think God is benign – no threat whatsoever to their wellbeing. Even people who admit to being completely ignorant about God will say with absolute certainty: “One thing I know for sure is God would never send anyone to hell.” But if we are going to know God we must know Him as He actually is, not as we imagine Him to be. And the way He is is this: He is the greatest threat to your wellbeing in the universe. He is the only one who can send you to hell. He is the only one who decides if you suffer eternal harm or enjoy eternal joy.

Scarier than man

Mt.10:28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

The point is not that the threats of human beings are no big deal. The point is that the threats of God are infinitely greater. And for that to have its intended effect on your heart, you need to appreciate just how scary man’s threats are. So let’s think about that for a moment.

Human beings can be terrifying. Think for a moment about the scariest moments of your childhood: Facing a bully alone, or your angry father, or getting called to the principal’s office after having done something really bad. Things like that can produce a feeling of fear in the heart that is almost unbearable. If you met an IRS agent and police officers at your door after cheating on your taxes, what kind of feeling would you have in your stomach? I recently saw a documentary on the human slave trade in Mexico. The first thing they do when they abduct a girl is try to break her spirit as soon as possible so she is easier to manage. One girl told her story of being abducted and taken to a place where she was thrown on a bed and mercilessly beaten. They began by punching her in the ribs, and beat her until she was unconscious. She did not wake up for a couple of days, and as soon as she came to they immediately sent her out into some of the most dangerous streets of Mexico to work as a prostitute for them. Imagine you are that girl. You have just been abducted and are on your way to that place. How do you feel?

My point is that human beings can be very, very scary. When Scripture tells us not to fear man, the point is not that what man can do is nothing. The point is that even though man can inflict unimaginable suffering, that unimaginable suffering amounts to nothing compared to what God threatens.

Scripture describes Judgment Day in terms of people being whipped or beaten with many blows. (Luke 12:47). Isaiah 63:3 says that when God gives those beatings He will get blood spattered all over His clothing. Jesus said hell will be like being in fire that never goes out. It is outer darkness – the person who goes there will never see anything again. There will be nothing but weeping and gnashing of teeth. It is utter loneliness. It is fear and terror beyond imagination. All that combined with the maddening reality of knowing it will never end. If you find yourself there, the torment will be so extreme that you would give anything if your sins would have just been one less. The guy who died in Luke 16 has been there almost 100,000 straight weeks now. Sixteen million consecutive hours – every second of every one of those hours has been sheer agony and terror.

Combine that with the relentless horror of knowing that even after all those 2000 years of suffering without a single second of relief, he does not have any less time left. Even after he has been there a million years, he still won’t have any less time left.

I have often heard preachers say it is wrong to try to scare people into the Kingdom. But if Jesus' words about hell were not designed to generate fear I do not know what they were designed for.

And it is important to understand that fear involves the emotions. If you do not feel anything and you claim there is still fear there, you are kidding yourself. That feeling the girl has when she is on the way to be tortured and to begin her life as a slave – that feeling she has in her stomach at that moment; that feeling is called fear, the increased heart rate, and the sweating and the knot in your stomach and the shortness of breath – that is what fear is.

And that is the sensation that David is calling upon these people to have before God. And they would if they had any idea what one second in hell would be like. I sometimes wonder if the reason we tend not to emphasize hell and the importance of fearing God in our evangelism is because we do not have much fear for God ourselves.

Richard Baxter: "If God's threatenings be true why do you not fear them? If they be false, why do you needlessly trouble men with them and put them into such freights without a cause?" (The Reformed Pastor)

As His children our fear of God is not like being afraid of slave traders or bullies, but it is very much like the fear of being disciplined by a loving but angry father. We do not fear any ultimate *harm* from God (since we know that all of His discipline of believers is 100% corrective and works to restore us – not to merely punish us). But even though we do not fear ultimate harm from God, still we know that His rod of discipline is excruciating. God is not like a parent whose spankings no longer hurt a child who is getting a little older. God knows how to hurt you enough to accomplish what discipline needs to accomplish. And that should be a terrifying reality for the believer.

1 Peter 1:17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in fear.

How seriously do you take God's warnings in Scripture? Have you bought in to a theological system that allows you to disregard them as non-applicable to Christians, or as problem passages? Or do you take them seriously?

I have to confess this is an area where I fall way, way short. I was thinking this week, *When do I ever have my pulse quicken, and stomach tighten and hands tremble before God? When have I ever hyperventilated out of fear of Him?* How lightly we tend to take God compared to how seriously we take bullies and the IRS and dangerous thugs and out of control cars and diagnoses of cancer.

Be afraid of your refuge

You may be thinking, "Wait a minute. I thought we were trying to convince the person of how wonderful God is." Which is it – are we trying to attract people to a beautiful, desirable God who is a refuge of safety, or are we trying to scare them with a God who is a terrifying threat? Why would you tremble in fear before God if He is a refuge and a source of peace and joy and delight? You tremble in fear before a threat. Is God a threat, why would I run to Him for safety? Does it make sense to run to a fearsome, threatening place for safety? If there is some really dangerous part of town that scares me to death to go near it, am I going to go there for safety in times when I am weak and vulnerable?

There is no question that Scripture makes a major point out of both running to God as a refuge and fearing Him as a threat – sometimes right in the same verse.

Isa.51:12 I, even I am he who comforts you (there is the rest and safety). Who are you that you fear mortal man, the sons of man who are but grass? (there is the fear)

Ps.130:3,4 If you, O Yahweh, kept a record of sin, O Lord who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness (there is the rest and safety). **Therefore you are feared.** (there is the fear)

Ps.2:11-12 Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling. (there you have fear, then safety then fear again) **12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment.** (there is fear) **Blessed are all who take refuge in him.** (there is safety)

If that seems confusing to you, it might help if you just realize this - there is not one threat. There are two opposing threats. And one of them will win. Imagine you are a little child, and in your neighborhood there are some older kids who are really tough. And they come to you one day and say, "Join our gang and we will keep you safe. If you join us, we will make sure nothing and no one ever hurts you. But if you do not join us, we will make you wish you were never born." And you are terrified.

Now suppose your father has a perspective you don't have. He knows it is just a few kids on your block, and it would be a piece of cake for him to protect you from them. You are in kindergarten and they are third graders and your dad knows the only time they could possibly get to you is on your way to school in the morning, and your dad walks you to school every day.

And so your dad tells you, "I do not want you hanging around those kids, and you had better not join their gang. If you disobey me, you are going to be in a world of trouble – do you understand me? And do not worry about their threats, because I will protect you from them."

So both the third graders and the father have claimed to be a safe refuge of protection. And both have threatened great harm if they are defied. So here is the question – which are you going to pick – the one you fear the most, or the one you see as the safest refuge? The way I asked the question presents a false dilemma, doesn't it? Because the one you fear the most and the one who is the greatest refuge is one in the same. The one you fear the most and the one that is the safest refuge is both of those things for the same reason – because he is the most powerful. If he is the most powerful then he is the safest refuge if he is for you and he is the greatest threat if he is against you. If you believe the gang, then you will join them because you believe they are the best refuge to keep you safe and they are the greatest threat if you don't join. And if you believe your dad you will obey him because you see him as the key to your safety, and his threats of punishment are something you fear more than the threats of the gang. So your greatest refuge of safety and your greatest fear are one in the same.

If there is going to be a head on collision between a tank and a Geo Metro, which vehicle would you rather be in - the one you most fear or the one you feel the most safe in? Again – they are one in the same. You most fear getting run over by the tank, and the tank is where you feel the safest.

So there is no tension between God's loveliness and His fearsomeness. It is not a paradox, because the more wonderful He is the more fearful a thing it is to leave Him. With God alone there is forgiveness, so let your heart be terrified of doing anything that would distance you from the only one who can forgive your sins. With God alone there is mercy, so be afraid to do anything to move away from the merciful one. With God alone there is joy, so be scared to turn your back on the only giver of joy and the only satisfier of the soul. With God alone there is safety and peace, so fear ever being outside of God's blessed refuge. With God alone there is love, so teach your heart to tremble at the thought of distancing yourself from God. With God alone there is eternal reward, so be frightened to ever forfeit favor with Him. It is God alone who is the delight of your soul, so may nothing alarm you more than turning your back to your great delight. Let none of the terrors of this world ever terrify you more than missing God's grace, losing God's favor, or forfeiting God's smile. Be horrified at the thought of losing one glance of God's love, one word of His kindness, one moment of His sweet fellowship, one sip from God's river of delights, one morsel at His banquet table.

If you want to fear God learn to delight in Him, because you do not fear losing something in which you only mildly delight. In order for the prospect of losing something to generate real fear in your heart it must be a great, precious, essential treasure. Learn to love and treasure God so deeply that nothing scares you more than the prospect of losing His favor, even for a moment.

Is God safe or dangerous? He is safe when you are running to Him and He is dangerous when you are running away from Him. As long as you are facing toward Him and seeking Him, He is the safest refuge there is. But if you turn your back to Him He is the most dangerous opponent there is. He is abounding in mercy, but only toward those who fear Him.

John Piper tells the story of when they visited some friends and his five year old son ended up standing eye to eye with this huge German Shepherd at their friends' front door. The dog was very friendly, but the child turned and started running away. And when he did that they dog started loping after him with a deep growl in his voice. And the owner of the dog said, "You had better not run. He does not like it when people run away from him." God is full of mercy and kindness and love, and He is the safest refuge there is if you come to Him. But He does not like it when people run away from Him, and He will run after you with a deep growl, and you will not outrun Him.

We need to call unbelievers to fear God, and the only way we will be able to do that without being hypocrites is if we fear God. One thing I am trying to do to learn to fear God more is to take advantage of suffering. Remember in our study of Psalm 63 when we talked about using all the pleasures of life as little emblems that illustrate God's love? His love is far greater than those pleasures, but still they are useful as miniature illustrations of it. You can do the same thing with pain. I have been trying to see all the pain of life as little emblems of God's anger. When something really hurts me, even if it is suffering that is not chastisement for sin - even if it is suffering for righteousness, still it is useful to use the severity of that pain to remind my heart about the severity of God's wrath, and to wake my soul up to remember to take God seriously.

Each time I suffer pain I try to remember to think this way: "*I can endure this suffering because I know I have God's favor. But what would it be like if I knew this suffering were the expression of God's disfavor toward me?*" The pain of a slap in the face, by itself, is no big deal. But if that slap comes from someone I deeply love and is intended as an expression of their anger toward me, that same slap would be incredibly painful. So as often as possible I want to remind myself, whenever I suffer, of how painful it would be if that suffering were God's chastisement. Pain is so useful for getting your attention and helping you take things seriously. Learn to use all your pain to train your heart to take God seriously.

2. Turn from sin

So the first part of repentance is trembling. Another part is turning from sin.

4 Tremble and do not sin.

There are some who teach that it is not appropriate to tell unbelievers to stop sinning. But how much clearer could verse four be? I may be way off the wall here but when it says **do not sin** I interpret that to mean that David told them, "Do not sin." Part of the gospel is to tell people to stop sinning.

Someone will say, "But they cannot stop sinning unless they get a new heart." Fine; tell them to get a new heart. That was God's approach in Ezekiel 18.

Ez.18:31-32 Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O house of Israel? ³² For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!

When you invite someone to know God, what you are calling them to is not an adding, but a turning. It is not an invitation for them to add Jesus on to the life they are currently living. It is a

command for them to turn away from the life they are currently living and go the opposite direction, toward God. It is not like going to a football player and convincing him to take up tennis in addition to football. It is more like convincing him to quit his team and join their arch rivals' team.

God and the world are on two opposite sides – not in a game but in a war. And to join one side you have to turn your back on the other side. And David's strategy is to show them the emptiness of what they are pursuing by contrasting it against the fullness of God. David exposes the evil of their sin by giving glorious pictures of the goodness of God, and then indicting them for failing to love that. People need to see that it is evil for them to love what they love instead of loving God.

God is Lord

The people who are trying to eliminate repentance from the Gospel are saying that we have to take that out because it might confuse people. It will make people think they are earning their salvation by giving up sin, and so it will obscure grace. What they do not realize is it obscures grace even more when people are presented with a distorted picture of the nature of God so that they don't understand that God is a sovereign King who owns them and who has the right to command that they obey Him and who will punish them severely if they do not. True repentance never obscures grace, because the more repentant you are over a sin the more you realize how undeserving you are of forgiveness. True repentance *increases* people's appreciation of grace.

You never harm people by telling them the truth about God. Some truths about God are hard for people to accept, but you are not doing anyone any favors by hiding those, or by watering them down or dressing them up or altering them in any way.

If we really believe God is perfect, and that He presents Himself in a perfectly accurate way in the Bible, then why would we want to edit His revelation of Himself?

And one thing that is true about God is He is lord of all. Amen? God is the one who determines right and wrong. His law is ultimate. It is universally binding. It is always right. There are no exceptions. There is no court of appeals. His moral law has never changed and will never change because it is based on His nature and His nature never changes. God's character is the measuring stick against which everything is measured, and there is no measuring stick against which God can be evaluated.

So be honest with people about God's lordship. Command them to stop sinning. No one is going to care about escaping the judgment of God until they come to believe they deserve the judgment of God.

God is worthy to be obeyed

And not only is God Lord – not only is He in a position to demand obedience and punish disobedience, but on top of that He is *worthy* of to be obeyed. He not only has the power to punish non-compliance, but He has the beauty and goodness to be worthy of total submission. It is not only mandatory that you obey Him; it is utterly *fitting* that you obey Him. If there could be such a thing as an evil, almighty God, then we would have to submit to him even though he did not deserve it. But there is no such God.²

God has the authority to require obedience, the power to punish all disobedience, and the goodness to be worthy of obedience. What a contrast between that and the worthless, cheese ball gods the world submits to. The things that hold people in bondage and slavery - like money or some human relationship or prestige or recreation - none of those things have any authority! People just

² The true God is so completely worthy of our obedience and submission and worship and loyalty that it is our own highest good to obey Him fully. That is really a wonderful attribute, isn't it? Absolutely every single thing you do that is in obedience to His law does you good. God is so good that obeying Him and doing what is in your best interests are in 100% alignment. Never, ever is there so much as a hairsbreadth of disparity between the two. A situation where you would have to sacrifice your ultimate good for the glory of God is as impossible as a square circle or a married bachelor. It is an absolute impossibility because of how good God is.

enslave themselves to them voluntarily. Nor do they have any worthiness to be the object of our love and pursuit. Only God does.

3. Listen to conscience

So the first part of repentance is to tremble in fear before God. Another part is to turn from your sin. (That does not mean you will have total success and full victory over sin, but it does mean you declare war on it. You change teams.) Now David adds a third thing: THINK!

4 Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.

Now that he has presented them with the truth he just tells them to go think hard about what he said. The bed is probably the place where the conscience is most powerful. It is so easy to drown out or ignore the voice of conscience during the day.

Your conscience tries to pin something on you and your conscious mind just says, “Not now. I don’t have time to think about that right now, I am busy doing this.” But when you lie in bed at night, and you begin searching your heart in honest reflection, it is much harder to escape the shouts of your conscience. It is still possible. You can still shout it down or ignore it. That is why David says, “Be silent.”

When you share the gospel with people take advantage of the fact that they have a conscience. That is a gift of mercy from God. Urge people to listen to their conscience.

The word translated “search” means “to speak to yourself.” So the command is ironic – “Speak to yourself and be silent.” “Talk to yourself, and while you are talking, shut up.” The psalms are full of language about speaking to yourself. Very frequently we read things like, “Why are you downcast, O my soul?” or “Bless the Lord O my soul.” To us David says, “speak to your soul” and then he says, “and soul – you shut up and don’t argue.” The part of you that understands and loves the Word of God must preach to the part of you that loves sin, and the part of you that loves sin needs to be quiet and listen.

I do not know if it is such a good idea, when you are sharing your faith, to call people to make a decision right on the spot. For a person to embrace the truth of the Gospel God has to first to a massive work in the person’s heart. And very often the best time for that is when the person is alone, at night, where it is just him and God and no people around to impress.

There is more to calling a person to repentance than just saying, “Do you admit you are a sinner?” People need to be cut to the heart by the Sword of the Spirit. Tell them “Look, I know you have your defenses up when you’re talking to me. But when you go to bed tonight and you are all alone; lay down all your defensive weapons and be still and accept what God is saying to you.”

4. Worship God

So you call them to tremble before God, turn from sin, listen to their conscience, and now number four: call them to worship God.

⁵ Offer true sacrifices

Only God is worthy of worship. We can imagine a great king who is powerful enough to force compliance and who is good enough to deserve loyalty and obedience. But we cannot imagine any person besides God being worthy of worship. Worship is such a high and holy thing that if it is offered to anything or anyone besides the Most High God, it is not only wicked but it is the most evil of all evils. Even if you offer worship to an angel who is pure and holy and who has never sinned, and who is mighty and powerful and dwells in heaven – even that is wickedness. It would be idolatry and is forbidden in the strongest possible terms in Scripture. This is because in order to be worthy of worship, the object of your worship must not only be sinless and pure and perfect and

holy and awesome and powerful and transcendent and glorious – He must also be ultimate. He must be eternal, with no beginning and no end. He must be above all things. He must not only be very good; He must be the greatest good. He must be the standard of good. For Him to be worthy of worship He must not only be powerful; He must be ultimately powerful and the source of all power. He must not only be wise and holy and loving, but He must be the ultimate source and standard and author of all wisdom, holiness and love. To be worthy of worship there must be absolutely nothing wrong with Him – not even the slightest thing, and He must lack nothing of value. When we say God is worthy of awe, worthy of respect and reverence, worthy to be obeyed, worthy to be loved, worthy to be believed – those are all things that could be said to one degree or another about good people. But when we say He is worthy to be worshipped we are saying something much larger. We are claiming for Him ultimacy in every respect.

5. Believe

Show them that all of this is done one way and one way only – through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. No one is saved by their religious performance, good deeds, going to church or reading the Bible or praying. No one is saved by being a member of a certain church or religion. No one is saved by karma. No one is saved even by inviting Jesus into his heart. There is only one way to have your sins forgiven – faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph.2:8 It is by grace you have been saved, through faith.

When you share the Gospel with people, do not ever let them walk away thinking they can earn salvation by being a good enough person. Make sure they understand it is by grace alone through faith alone. And when you tell them that, you will need to explain to them what true faith is. So just remember this: there are three parts: Knowing the truth about God and the gospel (knowledge); Agreeing that those facts are true (belief); Entrusting your whole life to Jesus Christ (trust). You put all three of those together and you have saving faith. Anything less will not save.

That age old question – “What about people who have never heard of Jesus Christ?” The answer is they are lost. That is why it is so incredibly urgent that we send missionaries. To be saved you have to know the truth, and believe it, and entrust your life to God.

Worthy of faith

God is worthy not only to be obeyed and worshiped, but also to be trusted. He is completely trustworthy. He can be relied upon utterly. That is true of no one else. The most trustworthy person you know will let you down. Only God has never broken His Word, never been unreliable, never failed to do what is best – not one single time. Only God! He is the only one who can be trusted with your ultimate destiny. He is the only one who can be trusted with your life on earth. He is the only one who can be fully trusted with your wellbeing between now and one minute from now. No one else has the power to guarantee you will not have a heart attack during that minute that you should not have, or an aneurism, or an evil or deceiving thought or emotion that will lead you astray. No one else has the power to protect all your loved ones during that minute. No one else has ever made promises that are anywhere close to the magnitude of the promises God has made (like Romans 8:28), and even the much lesser promises they have made they do not have the power to guarantee 100%.

When you talk to an unbeliever, remember that that person is trusting in something, and that something is not trustworthy. It is just wind and lies. Their paycheck, house, job, friends, family, spouse, church, health, doctors, education, science, luck, skills, intelligence – none of those things are actually worthy of trust. Not one of those things, apart from grace from God, has anything whatsoever to offer that is good. Only God is worthy of trust.

Conclusion:

Do you believe that God is infinitely better than the emptiness the world is chasing after? Do you believe that God is awesome and can fulfill our need to be awed? Do you believe His wrath is more dangerous than the most horrible human threat imaginable? Do you enjoy the unspeakable privilege and joy of being safe in His refuge? Do you believe God is Lord, and has the authority to demand obedience, and the power to punish disobedience? Do you believe He is so good that He is worthy to be joyfully obeyed? Do you believe He alone is ultimate and worthy of worship? Do you believe He is a delight to worship? Are you convinced that God is completely trustworthy? Just one more question: Will you tell people? Let's bring it back to compassion for the lost. If there is an ounce of compassion anywhere in our hearts, how can we believe all that about God and not try to lead others to Him? I will close with the words of Richard Baxter:

If you have the hearts of Christians, let them yearn toward your poor, ignorant, ungodly neighbors. Alas! There is but a step between them and death and hell. Many hundred diseases are waiting ready to seize on them, and if they die unregenerate they are lost forever. Have you hearts of rock that cannot pity men in such a case as this? If you believe not the Word of God and the danger of sinners then why are you Christians yourselves? If you do believe it, why do you not bestir yourselves to the helping of others? Do you not care who is damned as long as you are saved? If so, you have sufficient cause to pity yourself, for it is a frame of spirit utterly inconsistent with grace. Doest thou live close by them or meet them in the streets or labor with them or travel with them or sit and talk with them and say nothing to them of their souls or the life to come? If their houses were on fire thou wouldst run to help them, and wilt thou not help them when their souls are almost at the fire of hell?"

Benediction: Matthew 28:18-20 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Discussion Questions:

"You never harm people by telling them the truth about God." –

1. What are some truths about God that you tend to be reluctant to tell people?
2. What are some ways you can convince people that they are sinners in a way that they will accept and listen?
3. How can you convince people of God's goodness and at the same time His severity and condemnation of sin?
4. How can you convince people that what they think is so important is actually a worthless god? (people don't think they are enslaved to these things they love – they somehow need to be convinced of it)
5. Can you always listen to your conscience? Is it reliable?
6. Sometimes a person should consider the big step of giving themselves to God. But what if they are very ready to make that step right then? What do you tell them?

7. Can you remember how to explain what true faith is?