

## I. I'm Too [Blank] for Faith

- A. Welcome to part two of our series, I'm Too Blank for Faith. In this series we are looking at what we can say to our friends who have roadblocks and reasons to stay away from Christ.
- B. Last time, I'm Too Successful for Faith.
- C. Today,
  - 1. I'm Too Open-Minded for Faith.
- D. Someone said, a mind is like a parachute. It doesn't work if it isn't open. There's a lot of truth in that.
- E. To be open-minded means to be willing to consider new ideas, new viewpoints, and new explanations. It means to embrace your own opinions, while being willing to consider other people's opinions too. It also means following the truth wherever it leads, and that includes being willing to change your mind when the evidence says you should.
- F. To say I'm too open-minded for faith is to state a contradiction. A person who won't consider faith, won't consider the Bible, won't consider the claims of Christ is not open-minded at all. They're close minded. It's a gigantic contradiction to say I'm too open-minded for faith.
- G. It actually means, "I'm too close-minded for faith."
- H. But there is a point someone who says that is making.
- I. To say I'm too open-minded for faith is really to make a statement about Christianity. It is to basically say that Christians are narrow minded, intolerant, and bigoted people, and I don't want to be associated with that kind of person.

## II. Scripture

- A. So today, our topic is I'm Too Open-Minded for Faith. What would Jesus say to the voice that says, "I'm Too Open-Minded For Faith?"
- B. Let me read a paragraph of the Bible, and then talk about that statement.
  - 1. *That very night the believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea. When they arrived there, they went to the synagogue. And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to check up on Paul and Silas, to see if they were really teaching the truth. As a result, many Jews believed, as did some of the prominent Greek women and many men. (Acts 17:10-12).*
- C. This was written in Greek, and we're reading it in an English translation. That word, "open-minded" translates the greek word eu-gen-es. We get the personal name Eugene from it. It originally implied nobility. Later, it described people who were open-minded toward truth, not prejudiced, not hostile, not suspicious of others. To be eu-gen-es was to give an idea a fair hearing.
- D. Here they are, in the synagogue, confirmed followers of Judaism. These two men show up. They are clearly experts in the Sacred Scriptures, especially Paul. Paul knows the Bible — the Old Testament in that day — inside and out.
- E. Paul begins to speak of a man named Jesus. He makes the most amazing claim that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah of the Jews.
- F. For the three previous Sabbaths, Paul made the same claim in the synagogue of another town. The people started a riot, shouted him down, and drove him out of town. It was a violent opposition to a new idea.
  - 1. I think we can call that the close-minded position.
- G. But here, in the town of Berea, the people were awesomely different. They actually listened to Paul's message. And it says they listened "eagerly." Those words picture a ravenously hungry person devouring a feast that is set before them. The Bereans had a hunger and a passion for the truth, wherever it led them. That is being open-minded.
- H. It says they searched the Scriptures every day to check out what Paul was saying.
  - 1. Did it line up with the truth of the Bible or not?
  - 2. Did it square with the reality of the ultimate reality, who is God?
  - 3. They checked it out.
- I. The story ends by saying that many believed, both men and women. Not everybody, but many.
  - 1. In one place, violence to an unfamiliar idea.
  - 2. In the other place, open-minded inquiry.
- J. These people in Berea go down in history as the most open-minded group of people in the Bible. That is a good thing. Being open-minded is a virtue in the Bible. It's something praiseworthy.
- K. Okay, so that's the setup. I want to talk about what Jesus might say to a person who says they are too open-minded for faith.

## III. What Would Jesus Say?

- A. I agree with you. If Christians are narrow minded, intolerant, and bigoted people, I don't want to be associated with them, either.
  - 1. *Jesus was solidly convinced of his truth. His truth was so true, that, by comparison, every other claim was a lie (Romans 3:4).*
  - 2. BUT, that doesn't mean he wanted his people to be narrow-minded, intolerant, and bigoted.
    - a) He's the one who spoke with a Samaritan woman, shattering the bigotry of the religious leaders of his day.
    - b) He's the one who crafted the parable of the Prodigal Son, where a son crosses and recrosses every boundary a son could cross — morally, religiously, spiritually, financially, physically... advocating a level of tolerance the world had never known.
    - c) And it was Jesus who presented himself as the great Light of the World, and who presented a test of truth — that to know the real truth was to be "free indeed" (John 8:36)... a kind of freedom that is the opposite of narrow.

3. Jesus clashed with the narrow minded people of the day. He taught his followers to be gentle and kind. To hold to their truth without compromise, but to present that truth in ways that honored the dignity of every person they met. Sinful people. Unclean people. Outcast people.
4. Now, let's not shy away from the fact that we have a very precise message. The gospel is not a thousand things, it is one thing: Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, he was buried, and he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism.
5. We can't be wimpy in our doctrines and strong in our faith.
6. Some ideas are true. Some ideas are false. Some are correct, some are incorrect. Facts don't change because of our preferences. Facts don't change because of our feelings.
7. Open-minded opinions never changes reality.
  - a) No sane person wants their bank to be open minded about how much money you just deposited.
  - b) You don't want your pharmacist to be open-minded with which medicine gets counted into your prescription.
  - c) You don't want your electrician to be open-minded with how the house is wired.
  - d) In most truths, you need precision. This isn't being narrow-minded, or anything like that. It's just being factually correct. Which means it is in line with reality.
8. It is reality is Jesus saying, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me"* (John 14:6).
9. I am open-minded enough to believe him, and open-minded enough to encourage you to make up your own mind.
10. We teach a precise message, as Jesus called it, a narrow gate and a narrow way, but we always do it with an open heart and an open-mind.
  - a) *And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth* (2 Timothy 2:24,25).
11. Anybody who reads the story of Jesus in the Bible would never come away with the idea that Jesus told his followers to be close-minded and harsh.
12. So that's the first thing I think Jesus would say to somebody who says, "I'm too open-minded for faith."
13. Here's the second thing.
- B. I have commanded far more than tolerance and open-mindedness among my people. I have commanded love.
  1. Jesus wants us not just to tolerate people, but to love them. Love your neighbor. Love your enemy. Forgive those who hurt you.
  2. If you really believe in an open-minded and tolerant position, the epitome of that is biblical Christianity.
  3. We are taught to have good manners, and not silence the opposition.
  4. We are taught to respect authority, and not use force to get our way.
  5. We are taught to forgive and move on, and to never take revenge, because that's God's job and we're not God.
  6. We are taught to live and let live, even though we disagree strongly with the beliefs and lifestyles of those around us.
    - a) If you want to be truly open-minded, it's hard to find an option better than biblical Christianity.
      - (1) *Indeed this is your calling. For Christ suffered for you and left you a personal example: so that you might follow in his footsteps. He was guilty of no sin nor of the slightest prevarication. Yet when he was insulted he offered no result in return. When he suffered he made no threats of revenge. He simply committed his cause to the One who judges fairly.* (1 Peter 2:21-23).
  7. Do you want to know why our culture is so tolerant? Because of Christianity. The very fact that of all the cultures the world has ever known, it is western civilization that has been the most open-minded and tolerant, that very fact is due to the influence of the message of Christ.
  8. We Christians know what it's like to be hounded and persecuted for our faith, and we didn't want that happening to other people for theirs. So it was the Christian message that laid the foundations for the very freedoms we enjoy today.
  9. It is one of the biggest ironies in our culture that the message of the Cross has been slandered and Christians have been vilified as narrow minded, hate-filled hypocrites.
  10. I know that we have not lived up to our ideals. No religion has. No philosophy has. Not even atheism — ask the people who were murdered under atheistic socialism in Russia and China.
  11. We have not lived up to our ideals, but when we even come close, there has never been a system of thinking or believing as gracious and open-minded as the biblical Christian worldview.
  12. And when God's people get it right, there's no comparison. And I think that's the third thing Jesus would say:
- C. The history of my people shows unparalleled levels of generosity and sacrifice for the common good.
  1. This is going to be a weird illustration, but my Chicago church was in a really competitive softball league. In Chicago softball, a softball isn't soft. It is rock hard. It's 16 inches in circumference, and played bare handed.
  2. We played at Winnemac Park, which is a really urban, congested, diverse area. Each season, my church's biggest competitor was another church called Jesus People USA. JPUSA. They were a hippy commune of Chicago Christians, who took people off the street and blessed them and put them to work. There was Jesus People Roofing, Jesus People Painting, Jesus People Printing... and they were awesome.
  3. They were also awesome at softball — we were cross-town rivals in a huge way.
  4. And they were the nicest people.

5. I remember one year, when they were destroying us in the championship game, right as the game was ending, some of their group showed up with about 20 pizzas. They bought pizzas and shared them with us, their arch-softball enemies.
6. So, they destroyed us, and they loved us at the same time. Super friendly and cool hippy people.
7. I told you it's a weird example.
8. If you want open-minded people, you won't do better than Christians.
  - a) The Church is the largest single supplier of healthcare and education on the planet. This applies especially to spots often forgotten by the rest of the world. Most of this is supplied without profit.
  - b) Christians pioneered social work, going back to the days of Constantine. It was Christ's followers who first established "poor houses, homes for the aged, orphanages, and hospitals."
  - c) In the modern era, Jane Adams, motivated by faith in Christ, took up that work, founding America's first "settlement house," seeking to bridge the chasm between rich and poor. For this, she was the first American woman awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.
  - d) A Christian minister, Rev. Benjamin Waugh, became the driving force behind London's Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in the late 1880's. This society helped institute child labor laws in the western world.
  - e) Bernardo's Homes, the world's largest orphanage system, was founded by Thomas John Bernardo, an evangelical Christian.
  - f) A dedicated Christian, Josephine Butler, became an early advocate for the welfare of prostitutes. She campaigned for America's first laws establishing an age of consent for sexual activity with a minor.
  - g) William Wilberforce, converted to Christ in 1785, led the charge to abolish slavery in the Western world, as beautifully depicted in the film, *Amazing Grace*.
  - h) Christ's followers led the way in care for the elderly and disabled. Christians instituted the world's first "alms-houses" even before the 1100's. These were the forerunners of today's rescue missions.
  - i) The Quakers, a pacifist Christian group, brought about prison reform during the Victorian Era. They fought to ensure humane conditions and lobbied for education and therapy for prisoners in the U.K. and the U.S.
  - j) Louis Braille designed the system of raised dots to offer the gift of reading to the blind. He extended his creation to music as well as words, opening worlds previously closed to his sight-challenged friends.
  - k) Rev. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet pioneered education for the deaf and raised money to open North America's first educational institution for the deaf.
  - l) In 1911, Douglas MacMillan established the Society for the Prevention and Relief of Cancer, the first institution of its kind. It continues today as one of Britain's largest charities, and has birthed similar organizations around the world.
  - m) Millard Fuller, a successful lawyer and businessman as well as a committed follower of Jesus, launched a ministry called Koinonia House, now called Habitat for Humanity.
  - n) The Salvation Army, caring for the poor and downtrodden around the world, was started by William and Katherine Booth, evangelical ministers. Wanting to preach the gospel, they fed people first because they believed, "Hungry bellies have no ears."
  - o) Mother Teresa won a Nobel Peace Prize for founding the Missionaries of Charity, embracing India's untouchables. At her death, the order provided "610 missions in 123 countries, including hospices and homes for people with HIV/AIDS, leprosy and tuberculosis, soup kitchens, children's and family counseling programs, orphanages, and schools."
  - p) In both the U.K. and U.S., the first free schools were established by churches to teach illiterate street children to read. Public education was an outgrowth of these "ragged schools."
9. Christians were the first to fight cruelty against animals, led the way in the education of women, have done more to promote global literacy than any other group, are the first to serve destitute children and adults in poverty stricken areas of the world, are leaders in the struggle to heal and prevent AIDS, invented micro-finance for third world enterprises, and founded life-changing organizations like Alcoholics Anonymous and Amnesty International.
10. An amazing record for the flawed followers of the perfect Son of God.
11. If you value freedom, education, health, literacy, stewardship of earth, and care for the marginalized, you owe a debt of gratitude to Christians.
  - a) Here's my point: wherever the culture has closed its mind to people, Christians have extended a hand of help.
  - b) Wherever the culture has closed its heart to people, and thrown them away, Christians have been there to pick them up.
    - (1) The simple fact of history is that there has never been a mind as open to outsiders, new ideas, and inquiry as the biblically informed Christian mind.
12. You are invited to follow the One who healed lepers, embraced sinners, and instructed his followers to give a cup of cold water every time a neighbor's throat felt parched.
13. If you want open-minded, look at Jesus, because here it is.
14. I think the forth thing Jesus would say is:
- D. An unexamined truth is not worth believing.
  1. Do you have the intellectual curiosity to think through what you believe? Do you have the intellectual honesty to examine your presuppositions?

2. Pretty much every Christian I know has gone through a serious struggle with their faith. I know I did. For me, it was over evolution. I was raised a Christian. I went to church and all that. I believed in creation.
  3. But I was taught evolution in the schools. Eventually, it caused a crisis of faith for me. I realized that the two couldn't go together.
  4. The easiest thing would have been to throw out one or the other. But I didn't. I spent a couple of months reading and studying everything I could get my hands on. I wrote a major term paper. And I concluded, for myself, after an honest investigation, that the best way to understand my life and the world began with the words "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."
  5. I had another crisis of faith in seminary. I attended a solidly evangelical (that means Bible-believing) seminary in the Chicago Suburbs, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. It was a great preparation.
  6. But part of that seminary was an urban program, because that was my major. So I spent a year, studying in the bowels of Chicago. One of my teachers was Jeremiah Wright Jr. We spent a day at Operation PUSH (Jesse Jackson's group). We ate in soup kitchens, slept in rescue missions, spent the night on the streets, and got a real urban plunge.
  7. Our urban program was a huge challenge to my faith. They said the Bible had a problem with women. And with gays. They said the Bible was culturally obsolete, and had mistakes in it. They pushed universalism, which is the idea that all roads lead to God.
  8. Liberation theology. Radical Feminist Theology. Rosemary Reuther. And on it went.
  9. As a guy who grew up in a conservative theology, this was a baptism of fire in liberal theology.
  10. There was was that time when the head of this group, referred to God "whoever he or she may be."
  11. My little faith was being shaken and torn.
  12. Now, if I were close-minded, I would have never exposed myself to that teaching.
  13. But I did, because I want to be an open-minded person.
  14. And though my faith was stretched, when I got out of there, I was more convinced of my evangelical, conservative theology than ever before.
  15. Because I saw it really works.
  16. And I saw it was biblical, and therefore expressed the heart of Jesus.
  17. And when your friend objects to Christianity, because we're too narrow, ask how deeply they have explored their position. How deeply they have dug into the Bible. Because I suspect most people have not really investigated what they believe.
  18. They just go with the flow. Go with the crowd. And never give a fair examination to their suppositions and presuppositions.
    - a) *And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. (Jeremiah 29:13).*
  19. A half-hearted attempt just won't do. Truth is like gold. You have dig for it beneath the surface.
  20. Here's the last thing I think Jesus would say.
- E. Pursue the truth, wherever it leads.
1. One of the most influential apologists and evangelists of my lifetime is an author named Josh McDowell.
  2. He came to fame with the book *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. First published in 1972, the book rocketed to best-seller status. Josh McDowell blew my high-school mind with his flawless logic and undeniable evidence for Christianity. He spoke my language. His book assembled massive amounts of data to support the Bible as God's Word and Jesus as God's Son. When I read his book, I felt excited. It was like an encyclopedia of unbeatable arguments for Christianity.
  3. It was awesome.
  4. Fast forward a few years. Josh McDowell's son, Sean, came to him, and said, Dad, I don't believe any more. I don't believe in Jesus. I don't believe the gospel. It just doesn't make sense to me.
  5. I think as a Christian dad, those words would be incredibly painful to hear, but Josh didn't freak out, and he didn't attack.
  6. He said one thing to his son, "Promise me, you will follow the truth wherever it may lead."
  7. Sean said, "okay dad," and he went on a quest for the truth.
  8. Today, Dr. Sean McDowell is a professor of apologetics at Biola University and a passionate defender of the faith with believe.
  9. Because, if an open-minded person really looks into the truth of God, and reads the Bible with an open heart and mind, God's truth is self-authenticating. It proves itself.
  10. So to my friends who are too open-minded for faith, I would lovingly say, if you are really open-minded, give the faith of Jesus Christ an honest try, and follow the truth, wherever it may lead.