

School is such an interesting time in your life. There are so many experiences you have that are very unique to school. Some are very good memories, and some are not so good. Some are funny, and others are difficult. For me, I had some of my most embarrassing moments in school. I think Jr. High in particular is a breeding ground for some of life's most embarrassing moments. Let me share a couple of mine.

I remember in grade 10 those tear away track pants were a big thing (you know the ones with the button snaps down the side of each leg). I had a pair of those (you can see where this is going), but one day I was walking down the school hallway, and two of my friends, both tall guys, came running down the hall from behind me and each one grabbed one side of my pants and pulled as they ran past. My pants peeled like a banana and there I was, standing in the middle of the hallway, with my pants lying on the floor. I scrambled to button them up again as fast as I could, one snap at a time on the outside and then on the inside. I had more confidence then so I was able to laugh about it pretty quickly after. But that wasn't the only time I found myself without all my clothes on at school. Some people have nightmares about going into public without all their clothes on. I lived it.

It was grade 7 and my mom had got me a new pair of shorts. These shorts had Loony Tunes characters on them, and at that time Loony Tunes were really fun, and I was really excited about these new shorts. Well I wear them to school, and there were some guys against the wall and they started laughing at me. I'm all "what are you laughing at?", and they say "Did you forget to wear pants today?". As a very self-conscious grade 7 student, I was very confused. I said "well duh, I wore shorts, not pants". They kept laughing and they pointed out that I was wearing boxer shorts not regular shorts and that I was at school in just my underwear. Not wanting to admit this, I argued with them and assured them that they were in fact regular shorts. I said I am wearing underwear underneath, but they said that because they were patterned with characters, they were underwear. I was in full denial, until he asked if they were open in the front, or if they had a zipper. I looked and said "no it's not open, it has a button". It was then that I realized they were right. I didn't admit it thought. I went the rest of the day denying that they were boxers. It was a long day full of many snickers and laughter at me. And of course after that day I never wore my boxers to school again.

I'm sure nearly everyone has some embarrassing moments. Sometimes embarrassment is about something you did that you could look back on and laugh at, and other times it may take a while to be able to laugh at it. Then there are other times that you are so embarrassed that you are ashamed. Those times of embarrassment are often (but not always) a result of sin. One of the worst ways that we can be embarrassed is because of our faith. Everyone I know of has had times where they just wanted to blend in with the crowd and not let people know they are a Christian. I've had a number of those times where it would just be easier for me if I didn't have to deal with the reactions of people when they find out that I'm a pastor or a Christian. For many people they want to just fit in with the crowd rather than stand out. When students get to high school they are tired of the awkwardness of Jr. High, and students will often have two lives, one at school, and one at church. With their church friends they act one way and with

school friends they act another way. They are embarrassed that they go to church. In college or university, there is an entirely new pressure to fit in. Entering the post-secondary world you realize that you are surrounded by people who are much smarter than you, much more talented, and have much more knowledge and education under their belt. And when someone like that (either a professor or a group of peers) claims that God is not real or are mocking those who believe in such things, it is much more intimidating to stand up for your faith, or to simply profess your allegiance to a savior in question.

Then there is the workplace. Getting a job is an exciting time. You want to work hard, impress the bosses, make some new friends, because you are going to be at this job for a few years, you want to be liked, and you want to belong. When opportunity presents itself, it can be difficult to mention what you believe, or offer to pray for a co-worker who is hurting. Sometimes, it can be embarrassing, to really put yourself out there. You use the excuse that you don't want to be pushy with your faith, but the reality is that you are embarrassed about calling yourself a Christian.

Now when I say this, our reactions are all across a scale. On one side, there will be people who say "Yeah, I totally get that. I don't want certain people in my life to know that I go to church". In the middle, there will be people who say "In the right circumstances, that happens to me sometimes" and others of you who say "Not me I would proclaim my faith in every circumstance, no matter what! And the reality is that most of us are somewhere floating in the middle of that scale.

The bible is clear that it is dangerous to be ashamed of the Gospel. We are never told to be rude or pushy with it, but we need to understand what is at stake when we are embarrassed of Jesus in our life.

Jesus says in Mark 8:38 **If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."**

That is pretty important! He says "If you are ashamed of me, I will be ashamed of you!" It's important because it reveals what's really in our hearts. And for those who think that you are beyond being embarrassed, let's quickly look at a familiar passage. First in Luke 22:31-34 Jesus is with Simon Peter and he said

31 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you,[d] that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." 33 Peter[e] said to him, "Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death." 34 Jesus[f] said, "I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me."

54 Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house, and Peter was following at a distance. 55 And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them. 56 Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." 57 But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." 58 And a little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not." 59 And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted,

saying, "Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean." 60 But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about." And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. 61 And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times." 62 And he went out and wept bitterly.

Even Peter had a time of being afraid to identify with Jesus. However I would imagine that after this time he had a different level of resolve. But there are a bunch of embarrassing moments in scripture. Times where people fail to trust in God and it bites them back. Like Abraham not trusting in God for the safety of his wife, then claims she is his sister, and she is taken to be a concubine until the truth is revealed. Then there's Esau who sells his birthright and missed out on some serious blessings because he was hungry, so he trades it for some stew! It seemed like a good idea at the time.

But in our own lives we need to strive to not be ashamed of the gospel and its work in and through us. But how do we guard against being ashamed or embarrassed of the gospel. Is there something that we can do to get better at putting our faith out there? Let's take a look together at what Paul wrote in Romans 1:14-17

14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. 15 So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

That verse 16 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel..." Paul was not ashamed. He was not embarrassed. What can we do to have that same attitude? Some of you here can say these words as your own, others want to be able to say them and mean it. But wherever we are in this, whether you are going to a new school, or you are at work, or you are thinking about your friends and family, what can we do about embarrassment?

Now keep in mind that sharing your faith, your testimony, or the gospel, does not mean that we have to be foolish about it. This is not calling us to be unwise or bullheaded. I would imagine that Paul was strategic about it, bold about it, and sometimes even anxious about what would happen when he shared the good news. We are called to always give an answer with gentleness and respect. We are called to be wise. But we are called to share it. We are not to hide it or hide from it.

I think in this passage Paul mentions three things that can help us. **I think we need conviction, confidence, and power.** (REPEAT).

First conviction: Look at verse 14. Paul says that he is obligated to preach. He is not saying here that he is indebted to Greeks and non-Greeks, wise or foolish. He is saying that he is obligated to preach to all, which is why he wants to come to Rome. Paul has a conviction that all need to hear this life saving message. He has conviction that this is the mission. He knows that he must do this. He also knows the importance of the message he carries. It is literally **life and death**. Imagine that you knew a piece of

information that would save your friend's life. Imagine that your friend was going to go on a flight. And you got a piece of information that there was going to be a bomb on that plane. Would you not feel convicted to make sure your friend knew. Wouldn't you go out of your way to do whatever it took to get them to understand that you know that there is a bomb? In fact wouldn't you feel convicted to try and stop everyone from getting on that plane? You would cause a scene if you needed to. You might get on the runway to stop the plane if you knew that people would die if they didn't learn what you know. You would do whatever it takes. You would need to be pretty confident that you were right. But then you make sure that your friend was safe. This is the same as the Gospel. It is the message that leads to life or death. You hold that message. When you really believe that the message is that important, your conviction to act will increase. And you will take risks to get the message out. You won't be held captive by shame or embarrassment. If you don't believe that the message is really that important, then you will continue to tip toe around people, not wanting to stand out or look or sound silly, while the people around you continue on their path of death.

For Paul to travel around and make disciples was a huge undertaking. And you might be inclined to say "But Paul heard directly from God what he was supposed to do. God gave him divine knowledge and words to speak and write. God gave him a mission directly." But hasn't God given us the mission as well? He said to all believers, to go and make disciples in all nations – baptizing them and teaching them. It starts with sharing the message for the first time, and once they believe, they are to be baptized and taught. This is our mission directly from God. To all believers - every person no matter what context you find yourself in - This is the calling.

Next we can see that Paul has confidence in what he is proclaiming. If you want to beat being embarrassed of the gospel, then you need to have confidence in what you believe. Belief in the Gospel comes from learning and experiencing the power of God. Do you really believe in these manuscripts? Do you believe that God the Father sent his Son to die on a cross as a payment for sin? Do you believe Jesus when He said I am the way, the truth, the life and that no one comes to the Father except through me? Do you believe what is written is the word of God? If you struggle with this the best course of action to take is to learn more. Study it. Join a bible study, take a course on it, ask others around you to help you work through some of your questions, and to simply trust Him.

In May I took a course on the New Testament at Taylor Seminary, and one thing I found most interesting was that there is a ton of evidence to suggest that the Gospels were written and completed along with most of, if not all of the New Testament, before 70 AD. One reason for the early dating of the gospels is that up until 68AD emperor Nero had unleashed a massive persecution of Christians, and after his death, Emperor Titus took over and in 70AD attacked Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. The idea the gospels are dated before 70AD then is because early historians suggest that Peter and Paul were killed under Nero's persecution, and nowhere in the New Testament is the destruction of the temple mentioned aside from when Jesus predicts it. The destruction of the temple would be a massively significant event both historically and theologically that it would most certainly be mentioned at least. Scholars who date the gospels after 70 AD do so mostly on the grounds that Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple, and people can't predict the future, so therefore it must have been written after the fact. It's based more on a worldview, not on the evidence. All this to say that when we learn to

better defend our faith, or when we learn that scripture is historically accurate, and when we learn that the word of God stands strong against hundreds and hundreds of years of criticism, it then can give us deeper assurance that Jesus actually said and did those things. But do you need to know a whole bunch of facts to have confidence? Of course not, it's only one way.

The other way is to actually encounter the living God personally. To have God living in you and through you, transforming you and growing you, is profound. When you put your trust in Him and are able to watch him work, it builds your confidence like nothing else. But for many it's difficult to put their faith and trust in Him, because we like to cling to our own understanding. But when you trust in Him it is amazing to see all that he will do through you.

The last thing that this scripture says is that there is **power** in the message. There is power in the gospel. Paul says that "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes:" This is important to overcome embarrassment and being ashamed because the reality is that the word of God is living, powerful, and effective. The word of God saves lives. The word of God transforms individuals. The word of God transforms neighbourhoods, it transforms cities, and it shapes nations. The word of God looks into the future, it reveals our very being. No book has had such an effect on the world like the word of God. The gospel is the power for God for those who believe. If you are embarrassed to identify yourself as a Christian at certain times, know that the message you believe is the single most powerful message of all of history. When people experience the power of God through the gospel, they are changed. When you share the gospel, you are not simply trying to get someone to try a fad, and you will look silly if they don't like it. You are sharing with them a message that has been so powerful and effective through thousands of years. Hundreds of generations, millions and millions of people have experienced God's salvation through it. If you are a Christian, then you too have experienced it. This is why your testimony is a strong tool when sharing your faith. The Gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.

When we are embarrassed or ashamed, it is because we are afraid. We are afraid that we will be rejected. We are afraid that we might be called to do hard things. We are afraid that we might be wrong. Well, the reality is that the Bible has stood the test of time and criticism from some of the most educated people on the planet. Yet none have been able to make it break or even crack it. You can trust it. You can trust it for many reasons. And the reality is that yes, you will be rejected. We are even told that people will mock us, resent us, and reject us. But we are told to press on and not live in fear of the judgement of others who at the very worst can only destroy our bodies. And yes, you will be called to do hard things. Loving the unlovable, giving until it hurts, using your time for the Kingdom, and taking risks.

But the reward is beyond what we can imagine. Imagine if we all lived in a way that we were not ashamed of the Gospel, and instead let its power move through us to those around us at school, at work, at home, in our neighborhoods, clubs or teams. Imagine if you put your faith out there even more than you do, how God would work through you. And imagine if you are here today and you have not experienced the life-saving, life-transforming power of God in your life, what it would look like to begin the journey of knowing that you are deeply loved by your creator, who wants you to belong to His family, and discover your purpose in life and why exactly he created you in the first place. To have

access to the power of God that can transform your life and that can give you peace that surpasses understanding, joy in the midst of trial, and a mission that will change the world. If you are in that place, if you feel God speaking to your heart, then right now is when you should trust in him and ask forgiveness for your sin and put your trust in Jesus's life death and resurrection as the payment for the sin in your life. If you are still seeking God and wondering if there is anything here for you, then keep searching God's word. You will find what you need.

If you are a Christian here, then here is the challenge to walk away with. Start with prayer. Ask God to give you opportunity to share. And the next time you can share, decide to not be ashamed, and instead take the risk. Then watch what God does through that. Then, do it again. It may be something small: Like giving your lunch to a homeless person on your way to work. Or helping a neighbor weed their garden. You may not see the results. It may be something like offering to pray with a co-worker or family member when they are going through difficult times. Or inviting someone to church or small group with you, or answering someone's question about Christianity when they ask. But take the opportunities that God gives you, and you will see God work through you. This is how we can see our city changed, and our neighborhoods changed, and our families changed by the life giving power of the gospel.