

# Overcoming the Angst

Good morning everybody. If I haven't met you yet, my name is Kent and I'm one of our pastors. So glad to have you with us this morning. If you have a bible, turn with me to the passage we just read in **Romans 10**. If you are here for the first time or just missed last Sunday, welcome. To bring you up to speed, we kicked off a series last week called *Formation*, which I always have to say *isn't* actually based on the Beyonce song. That would be *cool*—I'm sure there are teaching series out there that *are* named after Beyonce songs—but not *this* one.

*This* series is about **the idea of spiritual formation**. Which we said last week is just fancy language for the art and science of how we *change* to become more and more like Jesus. This is a series, at least in part, about how we *change*. And last week, we spent the bulk of the time talking about how one of the primary ways that happens is through our *habits*: the things in our lives that we do over and over again. Our *habits* have a tremendous amount of say in the types of people we eventually become.

So in light of that, **each year as a church, we spend a month or two working through one particular habit (or "practice") that can help with that**. Historically, followers of Jesus have often called these "spiritual disciplines." Things that we implement regularly into our lives, for the purpose of helping us mature and grow to become more like Jesus. And this year, the *practice* we are highlighting is **the practice of mission**: demonstrating and articulating the gospel to people who have not yet *heard* it, or do not yet understand it. For the next six weeks, we'll be focusing on what it looks like to implement *that practice* into our lives, on a regular basis.

So this morning, I wanted to **kick things off** in one of the **more popular passages** in the *bible* on mission, which is **Romans 10**. I want to look there to discover, first, what mission *actually means*, but also to address some of the hesitations we might have *toward mission*. So let's read through this passage again, starting with verse 10:

**[10] For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. [11] As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame." [12] For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, [13] for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." [14] How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? [15] And how can**

**anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written** (a quote from the prophet Isaiah): **“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”**

So these verses are **all about the importance** of *mission*. It *starts off* by talking about the *importance* of people believing in Jesus. It even talks a bit about the *mechanics* of *how* that belief *happens*. It says it's with a person's *heart* that they believe. And it's with their *mouth* that they *profess* that belief. It then enters into this in-between section about how Jesus is Lord of *all* types of people: Jew and Gentile, it says. That's Paul's way of saying *everybody, everywhere*. God richly blesses *all* who call on him.

But then, in the final two verses, it asks **a few very important rhetorical questions**. First, “how can people *call* on someone they haven't *believed* in? And how can people *believe* in someone they haven't *heard* about? *And* (and this is where it gets really important and really practical for our series) how can people *hear* about Jesus without somebody *preaching* the message of Jesus *to* them?”

Now, real quickly: I **don't want you to get too hung up on** that word **preach**. When the biblical authors use that word, they don't necessarily mean “stand up in front of a crowd and talk loudly.” It *can* mean that, but it also can just mean to tell someone something in a normal, interpersonal setting. **If you go up to your friend and tell them that they have something stuck in their teeth (you know, like a real friend would do?), that is “preaching.”** It can also be translated to “declare” or “announce.” **If you're telling another person about something that has happened or is true, you are, by the biblical definition, preaching.** Tone and volume and setting is really *irrelevant*, to a certain extent. Preaching is just informing someone of something they aren't yet aware of.

**So Paul just says** “how can someone *hear* about Jesus unless someone *announces* the message of Jesus *to them*?” And then, how can *that* happen, unless someone is *sent* to do that?” **That word sent** is the Greek word *apostello*, where we get the English word “apostle.” And it means, most literally, to be sent on a *defined mission* by someone else. Paul here is talking about our *mission* to go into our various spheres of life and influence, our varying friend groups and workplaces and families, and even sometimes to other places in the world altogether—and *speak to those people* the gospel. **In other words, preaching isn't just something I do up here on a stage—it's something all followers of Jesus do wherever they go.**

~~Just as a side note, this is actually why we generally call what happens up here on Sundays “teaching,” and not “preaching.” It's not that *this isn't preaching*—a lot of the time it is. But we also want to reserve the word “preaching” to mean all that it means in the~~

bible, and not *narrow* it to what a pastor does for 40 or so minutes on a stage. **Preaching (announcing the good news of Jesus) is something every follower of Jesus is called to do throughout their life, and throughout every week.** *More on the mechanics all that in the coming weeks.*

For now, all I want you to see is that **what we're reading** here in Romans 10 is a *clear call* from Paul for *all of us* to declare who Jesus is to the world around us. There's *urgency* in what he's saying. There's significant *motivation* in what he's saying: go, *wherever you go*, and proclaim the good news about Jesus. **For generations and generations of followers of Jesus, passages like this one have been seen as a rallying cry, as marching orders to participate in God's mission.**

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But here's the thing: I think **what previous generations heard** as a rallying cry, some of us today may hear a little differently. When we think about imperatives like that, many of us feel a good bit of *reluctance*. I think specifically some of *my* generation (I'm 34), and *younger*, hear instructions like "go and preach the gospel" or "go and share your faith," and we honestly feel a little bit of *angst* about it. Maybe some *anxiety* when we think about doing that. **I mean, hopefully we can be honest about this: when you heard that we were going to do a six week series on mission, I would venture to guess that at least some of you were like "oh...that."** It just doesn't feel like that compelling of an idea to some of us. **There's this deep, residing angst in a lot of us towards the idea of sharing our faith with other people.**

And there could be any number of different reasons for all that. For some, it's because we've had some really **negative personal experiences** with sharing our faith. **Friends of mine have stories of being taken to the local shopping mall with their youth group (which is a sentence that I think only makes sense in the 1990s).** But while they were there, **their task for the day was to strike up a conversation about Jesus with ten different random people walking by at the end of four hours. As teenagers. Do you guys remember how awkward you were as teenagers? Okay, now add forced conversations with strangers to that. How uncomfortable are you right now? Okay, now you're getting a taste of how awkward those innocent passers-by were in those conversations. So maybe you had an experience like that, or something equally uncomfortable.**

I also remember all sorts of **clever mechanisms** we were taught for how to share the gospel with our friends. There were WWJD bracelets, which stood for *what would Jesus do*. Anybody old enough to remember those? Somebody told me that they are making a little bit of a comeback—and I'm not sure how I feel about that. But I was around for their *debut*. And the idea behind the bracelets, best I understood, was that people would ask

what the letters stood for on your bracelet and you'd *surprise* them with a gospel presentation. There were these clever tips and tricks for sharing the gospel with people.

Or maybe you've been on the *receiving end* of an awkward evangelism method. I think of door-to-door evangelists who show up on your front door step and open with a question like "if you were to die *tonight*, do you know where you would go?" Which is an interesting way to introduce yourself to someone: "Hi, my name is Kent. Now, suddenly and without warning: your *death!*" And some of us have a great deal of hesitancy towards sharing our faith with others because we don't want people to associate us with practices like *that*: door-to-door evangelists, street preachers, and the like.

And we could go on with examples, but we won't. For some of you, I know I'm probably stirring up memories of your childhood that you have worked really hard to *forget*. But let me just say: before we get *too* self-righteous towards any of that, let's at least give *credit* where credit is due. As cringe-worthy as some of those methods might feel to us, at least previous generations were doing *something*. Right? I mean I know people that *came to know* Jesus because of those types of methods. At least those that went before us had the *burden*—often guided by passages like Romans 10—to share the gospel with the world around them, even if it meant being a little *awkward* in the process. **We can critique their *methods* if we want, not their *motivation*.** They're *motivation* was beautiful: to announce the good news of Jesus with those around them.

But still, I think those experiences are why many of us are hesitant. We have had bad experiences with other things *called* mission, or evangelism, and we don't want to become *that*. Or we don't want to be *associated with things like that*.

But let's think about that for just a second. I think there might be *more to* our hesitancy than just bad experiences, and bad methodologies. Because I don't know those things make us *hesitant* in *other* arenas of life. For instance, do we stop sharing our aggressive opinions about our favorite *TV shows* just because we have a negative experience doing so? *No!* Do we stop sharing our opinions about our favorite *sports teams* because somebody else did that around us and we saw how pushy it was? Nope. In fact, half the time, that makes us *more likely* to share our own, *opposing* opinion in return. Many of you know me personally and know that I have never ever *once* backed down from sharing my opinions on good and bad restaurants in Knoxville because somebody didn't agree with me on it. I'll double down on *that* in a *second*.

But yet, if we have a few negative experiences in talking to someone about *Jesus*, it tends to affect us on a much deeper level. So what's the *difference* there? What is it that makes us respond *differently* when it comes to sharing our *faith*? Well, **I think it's that**

all those *other* opinions—about shows, and sports, and food—they’re just *that*: they’re *opinions*. Not *facts*, but *opinions*. They’re subjective preferences; *not* statements about how the world actually is. That makes them different from sharing our faith.

The *gospel is not an opinion*—it is a *fact*. It’s not *subjective*, it’s *objective*. It’s a statement about how things actually *are*. And that makes it a little more sensitive of a topic for us. It’s a fact. It’s *true*. And if it *is true*, by *necessity*, it implies that *other* things *aren’t* true. It’s *exclusive* truth, to some degree. And it makes claims of ultimate authority and ultimate allegiance and ultimate morality ~~and ultimate reality~~. And there are not many things that our modern society has more of a *distaste* for than that.

You see, most of us here in America have been disciplined well in a little something called *relativism*. A *relativistic* society, just in case you’re unfamiliar, is one where each person or group of people defines their “own truth”—their own ethics, their own values, and really, their own *reality*. But also one where *none* of those truths, ethics, values, or realities are inherently any *more* valid than any others. We live in a very *relativistic* society. And when I say we’ve been disciplined *well* in it, I *mean* it. Many of us have been disciplined *so well* that we don’t even *realize* we’ve been disciplined to believe it.

But it often *comes out* we think about sharing our faith with others. *Relativism causes us* look at our agnostic co-worker, or our Buddhist neighbor, or our Muslim colleague, and the second we even *consider* talking with them about Jesus, we talk ourselves out of it by thinking, “oh who am I to think that my truth is any truer than theirs? Who am I to consider that my belief system is any more valid than theirs is? Or even if we *do know*, *deep down*, that it *is*—we don’t want to give off that *vibe*. We don’t want them to *think* of us as arrogant, or self-righteous, or pushy. *This is the power of relativism: we tend to think things like* “well, this whole Jesus thing might be true *for me*, but that doesn’t mean it’s true *for them*.”

For example, a *recent study* showed that while nearly *all* Christians agree that part of their faith means “being a witness *about* Jesus,” nearly *half* of Christians believe that it is *wrong* to share your beliefs with someone in the hopes that one day that person will *share* them.”<sup>1</sup> So *think about that* for a second. Nearly *half* of people who follow Jesus are saying that it is *morally wrong* to share their faith with someone else if the goal is to change the other person’s mind. Not that they’d *rather not do* it because it’s *uncomfortable*, but that it is *incorrect* to *do*. **Many followers of Jesus now believe we are *doing* people a favor by not talking to them about Jesus. We’re *sparing* them an**

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<sup>1</sup> A summary of this data is available [here](#).

awkward interaction. We're *saving* them from the *discomfort* of having to consider a new belief system. We're doing what is *right* by remaining silent about it.

So here's **what** I would argue **is happening there**. There is a *conviction*—that we should share our faith with other people—that is colliding with a *worldview*—that we are good, Western, relativistic people. And the *worldview* is winning out, at least for around half of Christians. The *angst* of sharing our faith with others is overshadowing the *conviction* that we *should* be doing that.

So here's **what we need to figure out**. How do we *overcome* the angst? That internal anxiety many of us have towards sharing our faith with other people—how do we *get past that*? Well I think for starters, we need to realize that *relativism* is not unique to our day and age. Not by a longshot, in fact. **The society where Christianity got its start was also a deeply relativistic society, probably in more explicit ways than ours even is.** The Roman Empire in the first century was a society *built* on relativism.

And it **makes sense if you think about it**. Rome had essentially conquered most of the ancient world, as they saw it. And each of those conquered nations had their own gods, their own religions, and their own systems of belief. So **Rome had to figure out** how to get all of those different people, with different beliefs, and very different gods, to exist *alongside* each other at least *somewhat* peacefully. So **relativism was really the only way forward**. In fact, to make it clear that they would accommodate everyone's preferred gods, Rome actually set up a temple where they housed statues of everybody's various gods in one place, called a *Pantheon* (*Pantheon* literally means "many gods"). And you could go to this temple, no matter what god you believed in, find the room with your god in it, and worship. "To each their own," *literally*.

**If you lived in the Roman empire, Rome was cool** with you worshiping *any god* that you wanted to worship. *Just as long as* (and this is where it should start to sound a little familiar to us) **you didn't claim that any of your gods were superior to anyone else's**. It was unacceptable to claim that your truth was *more* true than anyone else's. That was the *one thing* you couldn't do. Because it was believed that if anybody claimed *that*, people could no longer live in *peace* with one another. →

Now, here's **the reason I'm telling you** all this. *Sometimes*, I think we like to believe that we've progressed *beyond* some of the claims the bible makes. We hear Jesus say things like "I am the way, the truth and the life, and *no one comes to the Father* except through me." Or we read seemingly dogmatic claims in the New Testament like "there is *no other name* under heaven given by which we can be saved." And we go "okay, yeah—but they just didn't *realize* how closed-minded that sounded. Bless their two-thousand year old

hearts. They said that back *then* because those were different times and they didn't know what we know, but we know now that it's best to be a good bit more subjective than all that."

**The only problem with thinking that** is that it's not even a little bit true. To view history that way is actually to be very *undereducated* in history itself. Because **the society in which Jesus and other New Testament authors were making these exclusive claims—these societies were every bit as relativistic as our society today, if not more so.** And the consequences in *their day* for making *exclusive* claims like "Jesus is Lord" were nearly always more *severe* than they are for us today. As in *martyrdom-level* severe. And **yet here the early followers of Jesus were, making claims that were every bit as offensive and narrow as they would be today, right in the midst of it all.**

So **the question we should all be asking** is *what gave them* that kind of boldness? What *gave them* that kind of audacity and courage? What would prompt them to make claims like that, despite the pressure *not* to, and despite the consequences *of doing* so? To go around, day in and day out, insisting that Jesus was *Lord*? Saying to people constantly, not just "this is true *for me*," but "this is true, *period*"? What would motivate them to do such a thing?

Well, **at least best I can tell**, here's the reason. And please, brace yourself for the incredibly *profound* insight that what I'm about to say *is*. They said it was true... **because it was true. Because it is true.** *That's* the reason. ~~This is why you guys pay me the big bucks, for observations like this.~~ The early followers of Jesus spoke like Jesus was the only way, and like their God was superior to all other gods, *because he is. That* was their conviction. And that *is* how the universe *is*.

And **that was their conviction** from the earliest pages of the bible: that the God of the bible was the one true God of the universe. **Genesis 1 opens with the line, "in the beginning, God created..."** Now we sometimes *miss* it, but that was quite the claim. Most worldviews at the time claimed that there were *many* gods who were at war with one another or in conflict, and as some result of that, the world came into being. But the *bible* claims that in the beginning, there was *one* God, and *that* God, *alone*, began to *create*. **There is only one true God.**

The **earliest confession of faith** the Jewish people had—one that is still recited by Orthodox Jews today—was pulled straight from Deuteronomy 6, v. 4. It hits on this same theme, it says:

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.* (As in, there is *only one* of them.)

**Psalm 96** sums this up beautifully when it says things like:

*For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared **above all gods**.  
For **all the gods of the nations** are idols, but the **Lord made the heavens**.*

**Jesus prefaces his instructions** to “go and make disciples” with the words “all authority on heaven and earth has been given to *me*.” In other words, I am the only one worth giving your life to. The repeated, clear claim of the Scriptures is that God is the one true god, and all the others are a sham. **All of this is why one theologian noted that “the most basic doctrine in all the bible” is *this* claim: there is (*only*) one God.<sup>2</sup> And *if* there is only one God, then people need to *know* that.**

So we **could give all sorts of reasons for mission**. All sorts of reasons for demonstrating and articulating the gospel to people in our world. We could say that it’s to *benefit those* people, which it is. We could say it’s because it shapes and forms *us* in the process, like we said last week. And it does. We could say it’s simply because Jesus *told* us to, which he did. But I would argue—and I think the Scriptures would argue this as well—that **the best possible reason for telling others about Jesus is that Jesus is the one true king**. David Bosch, a leading missiologist, says it this way:

*Mission is more and different from recruitment to our brand of religion; it is the alerting people to the universal reign of God through Christ.*

“Excuse me, are you trying to convert me?” Your friend says. “No. I’m trying to *alert you to the universal reign of God through Christ*.” It’s **already true**, I’m trying to help you, for your own good, see that it is true. *That* is what we’re doing when we live on mission: we are helping people discover that God is the only God worthy of our worship. He is the *only one* worthy of our time and effort and energy and resources. He is the only one worth giving our *lives* to, because he is the one that *gave* us life in the first place. The Lord our God, is *one*. There is *only one*.

Now **maybe you hear that and think** to yourself, “okay but isn’t that kind of *arrogant*?” Isn’t it *dangerous* to say that our belief system is the one *true* belief system and that others *aren’t* true? Again, *relativism* has disciplined us into being very uncomfortable with assertions like that. But as we’ve said before here on Sundays, it’s not *arrogant* to simply

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<sup>2</sup> From John Dickson’s *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*.



say that something is true. If I said to you, “Indya Kincannon is the mayor of Knoxville,” you wouldn’t respond to me by going “wow—what an *arrogant* statement for you to make. How brazen for you to just go around declaring that she is the mayor of Knoxville. You should have more humility.” No, because it’s not *arrogant* to say that something is true. Some people will *tell* you that it is, but it’s not.

G.K. Chesterson put it this way, decrying the silliness of relativism:

*What we suffer from today is **humility in the wrong place**. [...] A man was meant to be **doubtful about himself**, but **undoubting about the truth**; this has been **exactly reversed**. We are on the road to producing a race of men too **mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table**. (I like G.K. Chesterson because he’s snarky—not sure what that says about me, but that’s why I like him.)*

But it is not *arrogant* to say something is *true*. Now, you can say *true things* in an *arrogant way*, to be sure. People do that all the time. But truth is not *arrogant* in and of itself. So let’s be sensitive to *how we are talking to people about Jesus*. Let’s be *aware of the tone and the words we are using*. Let’s be *humble and gentle* in how we do it. Whenever possible, let’s do it in ways that are culturally winsome and culturally appropriate. Yes and amen to *all* of that. But let’s not buy into the lie that we’re doing what’s *noble* by keeping our mouths shut. There’s a world out there that needs to hear the good news of Jesus. They need to know that Jesus is king. **And according to the pages of the bible, it is precisely our job to help them discover that.**

Which brings us right back to the reason *Paul* already gave us for why we are “sent.” In *Romans 10*, Paul told us, and I quote:

*[12] For* (in other words, “here’s the reason...”) *there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, [13] for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

This is the exact same idea. The belief that we must be “sent” to preach the gospel is driven by the fact that Jesus is *Lord* of all. He is the one true king. He is the one true God. The way of Jesus is not just “true for you.” It isn’t just “*your truth*.” It is *the truth*. It’s not just *subjectively* true, it’s *objectively* true. And if it is objectively true, people need to hear about it. So that’s what we do. In how we live and in what we say, we proclaim that Jesus is Lord.

~~So as we begin to wrap up here, I just want to ask you: is that how you think about the good news of Jesus? Do you think of it as being not just true for you, but true, period?~~

~~Because I will tell you: that makes all the difference in the world when it comes to your readiness to speak the gospel to others. It makes all the difference in the world when it comes to your willingness to fight through the angst and overcome it. If the gospel is just *subjectively* true—if it's just one of many worldviews that happens to work for you and your life, your situation—you're not going to be all that motivated to tell others about it. But if it is *objectively* true—if it's not just one good way of life but *the only lasting* way of life—well then *that's* something to tell people about. And chances are, you will.~~

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So as we mentioned last Sunday, we've put out a **practice guide booklet** to accompany this teaching series. And we actually have them this week if you want one! You can thank Sara Freemon, who assembled each one of them by hand when our printing company didn't come through, but they're here! But in this practice guide, during each week of this series, we'll have a practice to work through related to the teaching that week. We want to not just hear things up here on Sundays, but actually do the *work* of putting them into practice.

So **this week**, there's a practice we've just called *Addressing the Angst*. And it's a brief worksheet where we can try to pinpoint and describe any angst we might feel about speaking to others about Jesus, and then work through all of that with help from the Scriptures.

It's **all pretty self-explanatory**, but I would highly recommend working through this on your own, or with your LifeGroup, or maybe *both* this week. It's a great way of actually dealing head-on with whatever hesitations you have. So that practice is in the guide, which you can get on your way out, or at [citychurchknox.com](http://citychurchknox.com)—either way. That's what we'll work through this coming week. I'd love to pray for the Spirit's help as we do that.