

What's Keeping Your Family From God?

✖ Whenever Tom tried to witness to his lost brother, a lump rose in his throat and panic caused his heart to race. William, Tom's brother, had a Ph.D. in philosophy and loved to argue about religion. That made Tom feel inadequate and just plain stupid.

William always raised questions about Christianity that Tom had never considered. So Tom quickly retreated, asking questions such as, "If you were to die tonight, would you go to heaven?"

William would immediately derail the conversation, asking: "How do you know that there's a heaven? How do you know that the Bible is any more valid than the Qur'an? If God truly loves us, why do innocent children suffer and die?"

The questions went on and on. Tom feared saying the wrong things. He also was afraid of appearing ignorant.

Finally, Tom worried that if he kept bringing up the subject of William's salvation, William would become offended and reject him. Tom didn't handle rejection very well, especially coming from his older brother. So he backed off completely from sharing his faith further.

Every one of us has flaws that can keep our loved ones from seeing Jesus in us. In Tom's case, the flaw was fear, and it

created a wall that stood between him and his brother William.

Fear can become a stronghold in our lives, making it difficult for those we love to accept the good news. But there is hope!

We can storm the gates and tear down the wall of fear that blocks our witness for Christ.

What do you fear most? Rejection? Appearing foolish? Being shamed by family members? Regardless of the nature of our fears, the power of God's Spirit can help us triumph over every one of them when witnessing to others (see 2 Tim. 1:7-8).

Fear of Rejection

Most of us enjoy being loved and affirmed by the significant people in our lives—family, colleagues at work and other believers. But we may feel that if we try one more time to witness, they will reject not only Christ but us as well.

If you have a fear of rejection, here are some ideas that may help:

Don't end communication. It's important to do everything possible to maintain a loving, positive relationship with all family members—saved or unsaved. We cannot be responsible for their rejection if we have done all we can to reach out with God's love and grace.

Jesus talked about the rejection that comes from being persecuted for righteousness' sake. His Word tells us we are blessed and rewarded as a result (see Matt. 5:11-12).

Even Jesus' family was estranged from Him (see Mark 3:32-35). Likewise, He predicted that some would completely reject us to the point that we might have to allow a broken relationship (see Mark 6:10-12).

Some believers take pride in having been rejected by unsaved family members. Yet, their rejection had nothing to do with boldly proclaiming Christ and everything to do with being self-righteous and downright obnoxious.

Such a witness does not glorify or honor Jesus. Be a humble, loving servant to your lost family members. Then if they reject you, they will also be rejecting the Suffering Servant whom you serve.

Don't stop trying—even if you are rejected. Jesus was rejected by everyone—including His disciples. Yet He still loved them enough to go to the cross for them.

We have to die to ourselves, to our expectations and to our own agendas when we experience rejection from our family members.

Too often we want them saved in our way, at our convenience and for our glory. When things don't go according to our plans, we use their rejection as our excuse to quit.

Loving those who don't appreciate our wish for them to get saved is being like Jesus. Are you willing to follow the example of Christ on the cross? Dying to self is the key to overcoming rejection (see Gal. 2:20).

Don't reject them if they reject you. Our lost loved ones may reject us and break the relationship with us. Jesus said that people will be offended by Him and by those who follow Him (see Matt. 11:6).

Though family members may choose to break off the relationship, we must love them when they don't love us. And we must serve them even when they don't appreciate it (see Matt. 5:44).

The Fear of Seeming Ignorant

Remember Tom and his brother, William? Tom was intimidated by his brother's intellect, and he feared saying the wrong thing or not being able to answer his brother's questions. The truth is that none of us have all the answers for all the questions people may ask us.

But living by these simple truths will help us deal with this fear:

Avoid arguing about religion. Some will try to debate trivial matters or religious doctrines or traditions. We don't need to get caught trying to defend ourselves or our church. The focus

of our discussion must be Jesus. One's personal relationship with Jesus is the main thing—everything else is secondary and pales in significance (see 2 Tim. 2:24-26).

Study God's Word, and witness about what Christ has done in your life. Though Tom did not believe he was William's intellectual equal, he did know much more about the Scriptures than William.

Tom was without excuse if he didn't know what Jesus said about Himself as the Son of God. He should and could know the promises of salvation just by studying the Bible (see 2 Tim. 2:15-16).

We should also be able to tell others what Jesus has done in our lives. Scripture instructs us to "be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks [us] a reason for the hope that is in [us], with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15, NKJV).

Don't be afraid. The Holy Spirit will put the right words in your mouth. Often the Holy Spirit inspires me to say things I had never thought of before. What He guides me to say is always just what the unbeliever needs to hear (see Luke 12:12).

Sharing about Jesus cuts through all the religion, dogma and ecclesiastical blunders from the Crusades and the Inquisition to the fall of present-day televangelists. Don't fight with family about religion. Focus your conversation on the only One who matters—Jesus, the

Christ.

The Fear of Being Shamed

We may fear being put to shame—or even bringing shame to Christ—when we share the gospel. While we may fear losing face or having our reputations smeared, the fact is that we have already confessed our shame and lost our reputations.

So when the wall of fear threatens to block your witness, remember these important insights:

You have nothing to fear. What can mere humans do to you when God is on your side? There is nothing your loved ones can do to harm or hurt you (see Rom. 8:31-34).

You have nothing to lose. You have already lost your life. You have been crucified with Christ.

Your body is already a living sacrifice. And you have surrendered all your possessions and rights to Christ. You are simply a steward of His boundless resources (see Luke 17:33).

You have nothing to hide. Though your lost family members may know about your rotten past—and may condemn you for it—you have already repented of everything and been forgiven by Christ.

When you are accused of past sins, you can simply say: “That’s true. I admit it. But I have quit doing that. I am forgiven of my past sin by Jesus Christ. I ask you to forgive me, too. Will you?”

Tear Down the Wall of Fear

I once heard a Bible teacher claim that Scripture says “fear not” in its various grammatical forms more than 365 times. After checking a concordance, I don’t doubt his assertion. He also said that one reason Scripture talks so much about fear is because we need daily assurance that we have nothing to fear from either God or man.

Make the decision now that you will not let fear silence your witness. Take God at His Word, and fear not.

Allow God to be your sure defense; trust Him to give you the right words to say and the right things to do as you live for Jesus in front of your lost family members. God’s power and strength will back you up, because “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:7).

Here are a few of the practical steps you can take to rid your life of fear when sharing Jesus with your family:

- Look up the promises in Scripture dealing with fear and begin to trust God to remove every apprehension.
- Bind the spirit of fear in prayer, and bind yourself to the will of God before sharing about Jesus. Loose the fruits of God’s Spirit in your life so that your witness will reflect His fruit (see Gal. 5:22–23).
- Memorize key scripture passages to share with family members who are lost. This is sometimes more effective than giving opinions or explaining personal doctrines. It’s also effective to

paraphrase these scriptures in your own words. Start with these: John

1:12; John 3:16; John 10:28; Acts 2:38; Romans 3:23; Romans 5:1-2;

Romans 5:6–10; Romans 10:9,13; 1 John 5:11–13.

- Find another believer who will help you role-play a conversation with your lost family member.

These steps will help you develop an effective witness for Christ and will build your confidence. Trust God's Spirit to teach you

what to say, how to react and how to overcome fear in witnessing to your family (see Heb. 10:35).

You can dismantle the wall of fear and reach out to your lost loved one. Pray and trust God's power to destroy the wall of fear in your life.

Remember to focus on Jesus. Don't allow yourself to be distracted by arguments, confusing doctrines or traditions. Learn who

Jesus is through His Word and share that with those who are lost.

Go beyond your fear. Know that your family's salvation is eternally more important than the possibility that they might reject you.

Secure in Jesus, you have nothing to fear, nothing to lose and nothing to hide. Let your loved ones see the new creation Jesus has made of you. Fear not!

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Lord, I Wish My Family Would Get Saved, *from Creation House.*