



Session #4 - Comfort Must Fall

Orientation: In 1785, when Thomas Clarkson was a student at Cambridge University in England, he entered a contest to write the best Latin essay on the topic assigned for that year: "Is it lawful to Enslave the Unconsenting?" He had rarely thought about the slave trade before then, but his research for the contest essay shattered his complacency on the subject.

After reading the essay aloud to an audience in Cambridge, he couldn't get the subject out of his mind during the trip back to London. He later wrote, "I sat down disconsolate on the turf by the roadside and held my horse. Here a thought came into my mind, that if the contents of the Essay were true, it was time some person should see these calamities to their end."

Clarkson was twenty-four-years-old and without influential connections. Yet he took the first step he could take: he translated his essay into English and self-published it. The essay encouraged people such as William Wilberforce, a member of Parliament, to take up the cause. Clarkson spent the succeeding decades in partnership with Wilberforce and others, digging up firsthand information about the slave trade for their campaign. Along the way, Clarkson became a target for the rich and well-connected slave traders—in Liverpool he was attacked and nearly killed by a group of sailors paid to do the job. Yet he and his comrades persevered, and Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807.

If the twenty-four-year-old Clarkson had given into his doubts (*I'm a nobody; there's nothing that I can do; the traders are too powerful; opposing them would be too dangerous*), the British slave trade might have gone on decades longer than it did. In this session, we'll consider how a sneaky, yet prevalent, giant called Comfort can keep us from stepping out in faith in the ways God is calling us to, and we'll see how that giant has been defeated in our lives.

Our job isn't whipping up our courage; it's remembering some key facts: ***Life is short. God is big.***

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.

Mark 8:34-35 (ESV)



Welcome to Session #4! Open it up!

1. When was a time that you had to put aside personal comfort in order to do something that God had for you to do?

2. If money, time and influence were no barriers, what would you like to see God do through them?

3. Did you take part in any of last week's "Between Sessions" activities? Share your reflections. Any insights from engaging in these activities?

Read the Orientation from the website.

Hearing it from the Word!

Listen for any fresh insights as this portion of the David and Goliath story is read.

1 Samuel 17:17-25 (ESV) ¹⁷ And Jesse said to David his son, "Take for your brothers an ephah of this parched grain, and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers. ¹⁸ Also take these ten cheeses to the commander of their thousand. See if your brothers are well, and bring some token from them." ¹⁹ Now Saul and they and all the men of Israel were in the Valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines. ²⁰ And David rose early in the morning and left the sheep with a keeper and took the provisions and went, as Jesse had commanded him. And he came to the encampment as the host was going out to the battle line, shouting the war cry. ²¹ And Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army. ²² And David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage and ran to the ranks and went and greeted his brothers. ²³ As he talked with them, behold, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines and spoke the same words as before. And David heard him. ²⁴ All the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were much afraid. ²⁵ And the men of Israel said, "Have you seen this man who has come up? Surely he has come up to defy Israel. And the king will enrich the man who kills him with great riches and will give him his daughter and make his father's house free in Israel."

Explore it!

4. What was one thing that stood out to you from the Scripture, and why?

5. What was the Israelites' situation in the Valley of Elah?

How might this have led to their complacency in facing Goliath?

Watch the video segment for session four, and jot down some notes using the comments below:

- The Christian life is not a spectator sport. It's not about sitting in a comfortable church celebrating a Savior who led an uncomfortable life.
- Jesus did not come to live an easy life and retire in luxury. He came to fulfill a purpose, and he calls us to fulfill the mission that he gave to us.
- David accomplished in forty minutes what the entire Israelite army couldn't accomplish in forty days. The men were not motivated to go into battle because they had tents, food, and supplies—in a word, they were *comfortable*.
- Our faith thrives in discomfort. No one in Scripture who played a significant role in God's plan ever did so by choosing the easy route, living in ease, or refusing to take a task.
- The cross—the supreme example of difficulty and suffering—is where the Gospel is unpacked in all its power. God chose the difficult path of sending His Son to die on our behalf.
- Faith flourishes in hostile territory because it is countercultural. God moves among his people when they are willing to step out of their comfort zone and pursue his plans.
- It is in the soil of discomfort that the seeds of the Gospel most often flourish.
- We sign up to be partners with God when we choose to be where Jesus is—and go wherever that leads us. As we do, the layers of comfort fade away, and the giant of comfort falls.



Reflect on it!

6. Why is comfort a dangerous giant? How can it affect us for the worse?

7. On a scale of 0 to 5, how important is comfort to you? Why did you answer the way you did? How does your desire for comfort play itself out in your daily life?

8. Can you see any areas in which your desire for comfort is limiting what you might do for God? If so, what are those areas?

9. The point of our lives is the fame of Jesus. How can our lives proclaim the fame of Jesus?

10. "Life is short. God is big." How would you explain each of those statements in your own words? Why are they important to remember together?

11. What might it look like for you to get out of your comfort zone in order to serve God in some way? What are some areas where you might serve God in our church? How do you feel about that?

Apply it to your life...Living from Victory

(Leader needs something to write on for the group to see (paper on wall or flipchart) and a marker.)

As a group, take some time to brainstorm a list of attributes that Jesus and David had that are the opposite of comfort seeking. For example: *passionate, bold, generous, selfless, initiative, purpose-driven, and missional*. The leader will write these attributes on the whiteboard/paper.

Next, the leader will ask everyone in the group to complete one of these sentences:

If I were _____ like Jesus, then I would _____.

If I were _____ like Jesus, then I wouldn't have to _____.

For example, "If I were generous like Jesus, then I would give sacrificially of my time for the work of God's kingdom." "If I were missional like Jesus, then I wouldn't avoid initiating significant conversations with the people at work.

When everyone has had a chance to complete the sentence, the leader will ask participants to share one risk they are going to take based on these truths about who they are in Christ. "This week, I'm going to step out of my comfort zone and follow Jesus into this risk: _____." Encourage everyone to speak aloud one risk in front of the group.

To go deeper, check out the church website under the LifeGroups tab for ASK resources.

Pray within your group...

Close the session by praying together this prayer based on Paul's words in Philippians 1:20-21, 27-29! Don't forget to pray for each other!!




Going Deeper ~ ASK ~ Ask, Seek, Knock!

There will be a time for you to share these reflections at the next session.

Ask: Living Beyond Comfort.

Do at least one thing this week that stretches you as you seek to boldly follow Jesus. Here are a few possibilities:

- Do a random act of kindness (see the ideas at www.randomactsofkindness.org/kindness-ideas.)
- Do a non-random act of kindness, helping out someone (an elderly neighbor, for example) who could use the help. Rake their leaves, shovel their snow, return their trashcans from the curb to the garage. (Before you act, ask them what would be most helpful.)
- Invite someone to church.
- Make a donation to a ministry that advocates for the "least of these."
- Tell someone in your life, other than your spouse or significant other, that you love them.
- Tell a nonbeliever something that you have learned from *Goliath Must Fall*.
- Ask someone how you can pray for them. If you're already comfortable doing that with believers, ask a nonbeliever.
- Write a handwritten thank-you note to someone who has been kind to you or supported you in some way. Or make a phone call or face-to-face visit with a family member to say thank you. (No texting or emailing.)
-  Serve at a homeless shelter.

Write a few sentences about your experience outside your comfort zone to share at your next meeting.

Seek Worship: Chew on This.

The Apostle Paul had a lifestyle of living an all-in existence for Jesus. Again and again, he was arrested and beaten for spreading the word about Jesus. He hiked across the mountainous and desolate terrain of what is modern-day Turkey; he was shipwrecked several times; he went hungry and cold. Here is something he wrote to some friends in the town of Philippi.

¹⁰ ... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.

If comfort has a strong pull in your life, spend some time reflecting on this passage. You might commit to memory verses 10-11, or you might zero in on the phrase "participation in his sufferings." In what ways might Jesus want you to share in his sufferings, taking a risk for the sake of the gospel? Or you might focus on the phrase "I press on." How can you press on to take hold of what Jesus offers, as opposed to passively waiting for life to fall into your lap? Choose a phrase or a sentence that you can use as a weapon against that dead giant of comfort.

If you're uncomfortable with the phrase you've chosen, that's great! Spend ten minutes with it anyway, chewing on its meaning for your life. Thank God for what He's teaching you. Offer Him some worship about it. Maybe you've got more questions than answers about it at this point. Maybe you don't feel ready to take the step you think Jesus is calling you to take. That's fine. For now, just sit with your uncomfortable phrase and let it soak into your mind and raise your heart toward Christ.

Finally, write your phrase as a note on your phone. For the next week, every time you check your phone for messages, check in with your phrase as a message from God to you. Think about how it applies to you at that moment.

Write down a few notes about reflecting on Scripture to share with your group next week.

Knock and Proclaim: Talk to Someone.

Tell someone what you've learned about yourself and comfort this week. Instead of telling a close friend, challenge yourself to talk to someone at work, or a friend of your child's friend, or someone else you know less well.

You could simply say, "I'm taking a class, and we've been learning about the natural tendency to play it safe and not take risks. I have learned about myself that _____." You could even ask, "Have you ever thought about what living a bold life looks like?" Listen to their response and take it as an opportunity to deepen a relationship.

The point of this exercise is to develop experience of talking about your faith naturally with the people in your life. You're not dumping the whole truck of the gospel on someone, but you're providing openings where a spiritual conversation could occur if the other person signals willingness. Make some notes to share with your group.