

WITNESSING

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to WGBD's mini course on witnessing. Our Real Audio Internet teacher is Dr. A. W. Tozer. The text portion has been extracted from the Shadrach Youth Discipleship Ministry manual, and the Call to Obedience newsletter by Pastor Reimar Schultze. Click to this link for this study online at: <http://www.wgbd.org/tozer.html>

The best preparation for a powerful and effective witness is prayer. Also it is more important that you allow the Holy Spirit to lead, guide, and direct you in your witnessing. This study has been designed to be used with the Holy Bible (all scripture references are King James Version). Please feel free to make copies and use the study in a group or individual setting.

WITNESSING

Witnessing has the prospect of great fruit. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him" (Ps. 126:5,6)

THE POWER OF HIS NAME

The Bible says, "The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run to it and are safe. (Pr. 18:10)

The name of the Lord is powerful and exerts a profound effect on people. Many times the simplest mention of His name releases a power that makes sinners sit and take notice and brings encouragement and comfort to the Christians. This makes witnessing so exciting. God is so great that if the humble Christian merely brings up the name of God in conversation, God begins to do wonderful things. And not only does He do great things for the people who hear the testimonies of the children of God, but He works wonders for the people who are doing the witnessing.

OVERCOMING GRACE

In Revelation 12:11, we are taught that the Christians overcame the devil "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony." This Scripture tells us that the person who is saved and who testifies receives overcoming grace from the Lord. Here is one of the spiritual secrets to an overcoming live as a victorious Christian.

When a Christian reads the Bible consistently, has a steady prayer life, and humbly begins to witness (the first three basics of Christian living), he or she receives the joy of the Lord. And the Bible also says that, "the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Ne. 8:10). This joy gives one the strength to resist the devil and to not yield to temptation or discouragement. It also enables us to keep on praising the Lord no matter what happens and release even more of God's power into our lives.

WITNESSING AND ACKNOWLEDGING

Because so much spiritual power is involved, either the devil will work hard to put fear into your heart so that you can't bring yourself to testify, or he will try to get you to talk too much and ruin your witness. So be careful how you begin the life of witnessing so that you won't quit or become ineffective.

One aspect that is helpful is to make a distinction between witnessing and acknowledging. Both are good and right.

Proverbs 3:6 says, "In all your ways acknowledge him." This means to bring up his name in some way during any encounter you may have with someone else. For example, when someone greets you and asks how you are doing, you could respond, "I'm doing fine; the Lord helping me." Or when you are at the cashier's stand, you could say, "May the Lord give you a good day today." Or, finally, when you are in line at a cafeteria, you could mention to the person next to you how privileged we are to live in America where we have plenty to eat and mention how thankful you are the Lord has blessed our country. There are many other ways to acknowledge him because he said to do so in "all your ways."

To witness, on the other hand, is to tell what the Lord Jesus has done for you. Sometimes simply acknowledging him will open a door for you to go a step farther and witness to your salvation. To witness is to express your joy and gratitude that the Lord saved you and changed you from darkness to light. It is your experience. No one can take it away from you, and he or she has no right to challenge you because it is your personal experience. You see, you do not judge people or tell them they are going to hell. You simply tell what happened to you. Someone asks you how you are doing, and you look them right in the eye and say, "Oh, I'm doing great ever since the Lord saved me and changed me from darkness to light!" Many times, people don't know what to do with what they hear, and sometimes they will give a nervous laugh or make some comment, but, deep down, you have touched them and they feel it.

START WHERE YOU ARE

How do you begin? Start at whatever level of witnessing you can. If witnessing is hard, start in some safe place like church or at home. Simply express praise for the Lord saving you. Be faithful to praise the Lord for salvation. If you are faithful to praise him, he may give you something else to testify about. Testifying at church is foundational whether in the worship service or the youth meeting. Christians need to hear how the Lord is helping other Christians--it helps them, too.

In time, begin to witness or acknowledge the Lord to people you meet when you are out and about. Practice witnessing. Go to three or four different locations and wish them a good day in the Lord or give some other acknowledgment. If you are complimented for something, tell them the Lord helped you to do it. As with Bible reading, start at some level you can maintain faithfully and not get overloaded. Consistency is important. Don't bite off more than you can chew.

Don't Testify Above Your Experience

Keep humble and honest. You must tell what the Lord has done for you and how he has changed your life. But you do not want to testify beyond what he has done and tell of some victory in your life that has not occurred yet. When you testify about some victory in your life, don't say, "I won't be troubled by that sin anymore, or "The devil can't tempt me about that anymore." That is giving undue attention to yourself. Say something like, "Praise the Lord for delivering me. By God's grace, I know he will continue to help me.

People Are Ready For Good News

Don't forget, we are living in a dark and hurting world. People are hungry for good news because so much bad news is around them. If you joyfully tell others how the Lord has helped you, it will bring healing and encouragement. Some may not know right away that they are encouraged and they will not respond as they should, but it is still helping them. Many will be grateful that you took the time to tell them your good news. Of course, the next step after witnessing is soul winning. But, as you can see, that is a subject for another article, sometime.

OVERCOME YOUR FEARS

Many people are so afraid to witness, they don't even think about doing it. They put it out of their mind because they think they can't do it. But the Lord "did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Ti. 1:7). Jesus has the power to overcome your fears so that you can obey him in witnessing and receive the joy of the Lord that he wants you to have. He won't ask you to do more than you are able to do. But he may stretch you to your limits. He wants every Christian to witness or testify and make it a part of their lifestyle. He said in Matthew 10:32, "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven."

Jesus also said, "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory" (Lu. 9:26). We can overcome our fears and obey, by God's grace. One big fear we face is the fear of rejection. Rejection is hard to handle. We all have a need to feel loved and accepted. But if we witness consistently, we will experience rejection. People can be neither loving nor accepting, at times. But this was the way it was with Jesus. "He was despised and rejected of men" (Is. 53:3). "He came to his own, and his own did not receive him" (Jn. 1:11). We are privileged to share some of what he went through when he was on earth.

The way to handle rejection is to rest in the acceptance and love of the Lord. We don't want to look for acceptance by the world, anyway. The world is lost. We are the children of God. We are more concerned with what God thinks than what people think. Do not be so concerned whether or not unbelievers reject you. Be concerned, that unbelievers will be rejected by God for their sins unless they repent and receive the Lord's forgiveness!

Also, after you plunge in and begin to try to witness humbly and cautiously, the Lord's overcoming grace will strengthen you and bless you with such joy that it is all right if you are rejected or people think you are weird or fanatic. If you experience the abiding presence of Jesus that comes from obedience, you will want it more than the approval of friends or family. He will give you the grace to overcome all obstacles. But you have to move out and obey.

JESUS A MODEL SOUL WINNER

"...he that winneth souls is wise." Proverbs 11:3

"He left Judea, and departed again into Galilee. And he must needs go through Samaria. Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink" (John 4:3-7). Oh, where would we be without this model for soul-winning? Here and in John 3, we have the only dialogues that focus purely on soul-winning in all the gospels. Without these stories, we would be much amiss in knowing how to go about winning a soul to Jesus. We may say, yes, we know that Jesus came to seek and to save that which is lost, but we wish he had given us at least one example of how specifically it is to be done. Glory to God - we have an example in the story of the Samaritan woman.

The Distinction between Witnessing and Soul-winning.

For the purpose of this letter, let me define these terms: in witnessing, we identify ourselves with Jesus, and in soul-winning, we go beyond that identification, making an effort to actually lead a soul to Christ.

We are encouraged to witness from many passages in the Bible, such as Proverbs 3:5,6: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." This tells us that if we want to be led by the Holy Spirit, we must identify ourselves with the Lord in all our ways.

Jesus also stressed the importance of witnessing in Luke 9:26: "For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels."

In a practical way, we identify ourselves with Jesus. For example, we witness when we meet someone at the gas station or at a bank. We may say, "We surely want to thank the Lord for this beautiful day," or "I am thankful for Jesus' cleansing blood today," etc.. These little words and testimonies please the Lord and satisfy his command, "In all thy ways acknowledge him."

However, important as such a witness is, in many situations, God wants us to go beyond that. He wants our witness to develop into an effort and determination whereby we are truly endeavoring to win a soul to Christ. Witnessing is similar to throwing bait to a fish, but soul-winning is catching that fish.

Principles of Soul-winning.

In John 4, we find some basic principles for soul-winning.

1. We must be led by the Spirit: "...he must needs go through Samaria."

The term "being led by the Spirit" may be new to some of you, and yet it is scriptural. The apostle Paul said, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14). We read in Luke 4:1, "And Jesus...was led by the Spirit into the wilderness." If the Holy Spirit is leading us, then the Holy Spirit can work through us in witnessing.

It is the Holy Spirit who led Jesus through despised Samaria from Galilee to Jerusalem! And, of course, to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit always requires self-denial. Self will never, and can never, be led by the Holy Spirit. It must be denied, our plans being laid at the foot of the cross.

JESUS A MODEL SOUL WINNER

We must realize that we are all called upon to win souls.

John 4 is the model for soul-winning, and it is a model to be imitated by all of us even though the circumstances may vary widely. When Jesus said "as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:21), he meant, among other things, we were to give ourselves to soul-winning, even as he did.

At his ascension, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Lord wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). And Jesus' last words were related to soul-winning: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons.... But ye shall receive power... and ye shall be witnesses" (vv. 7,8). The disciples wanted to know about prophecy, about the whens and hows, but Jesus said: Forget it - be witnesses!

Too many believers are wrapped up in prophecy, but they do nothing toward leading souls to Christ.

Witnessing and soul-winning got into the hearts of the early Christians, for when they were driven out of Jerusalem, all the lay people "went every where preaching the word" (8:1,4). May that fire of the early Christians once again burn in our hearts.

We must press through when we don't feel up to it: "Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well" (John 4:6).

Jesus was tired. It was noon. The sun was mercilessly blazing upon his head. Jesus wanted to rest. Rest was on his mind. When you have rest on your mind, you do not feel like witnessing.

We may make a host of excuses: "I am exhausted... I don't feel in the spirit... I don't know what to say... There will be a better time... Surely, this is not God's time... Somebody else will reach them better," etc..

If we allow feelings to govern our soul-winning - we might as well forget it! Those who only make their beds, clean their houses, take out the garbage, visit the sick, and pray when they feel like it, are not fit for the kingdom. A soul-winner goes by three solid facts: he is saved, the poor sinner is lost, and God has said, "Rescue the perishing." He does not go by feelings. In fact, our very weaknesses and inadequacies are the qualifications we need to trust the Lord with all our heart and to engage his all-sufficiency.

Soul-winning Means Breaking Down Barriers.

Let us consider three barriers Jesus had to break down in his encounter with the Samaritan woman.

1. Jesus Broke through the Sexual Barrier: "There cometh a woman..." (v. 7).

If you dream about the ideal soul-winning situation, it will never happen. Every soul-winning encounter I have had looked impossible - some more than others.

In many places in the Middle East, there are barriers between men and women. Furthermore, a single man and an adulterous woman alone at a well was an uncomfortable situation. There were only two options for Jesus: to leave, or to witness. Jesus chose to abandon accepted, earthly etiquette, choosing instead to witness. In doing so, he greatly surprised his disciples, for it says, "And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman..." (v. 27a).

2. Jesus Broke through the Religious Barrier: "Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? For the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (v. 9).

JESUS A MODEL SOUL WINNER

The Samaritan population arose during the Assyrian occupation, were the children from mixed marriages between Jews and Assyrians. These people had adopted the five books of Moses, they had a messianic expectation, and they expected a temple to be rebuilt in Samaria. The Jews hated these "corrupted competitors." Hence, no dealing with the Samaritans. But Jesus broke through this barrier also. The Holy Spirit led so, and divine love did so! When you are walking in the Spirit, you must not allow any barriers to stop you.

Many people start to witness, stepping into the way of soul-winning, but when the barriers come up, they become weary and quit before the battle is won. They quit when they are confronted with blank stares of disinterest, with statements like, "I'm a Hindu," or "I have my own religion," or "Christians are hypocrites."

3. Jesus Broke through the Sin Barrier: "...thou hast had five husbands..." (v.18).

The Samaritan woman was an adulteress. She could have been a prostitute, or the town sinner. Scholars tell us that it was uncommon in that day for someone to go to a well to draw water in the heat of high noon, except for the outcasts. This woman was a woman who had no morality. To her, there was no sin - only pleasure and then disappointment.

Why witness to the wicked, to sexual perverts, to the immoral, or to the rebellious? Why witness to a man who has tattoos all over his arms and chest, holding a glass of beer in one hand and a cigarette in the other, with pornographic pictures on his walls? Friend, is that a barrier to press through, or is it a stop sign to give up and back off? Oh, keep on, my friend. Didn't Jesus say, "Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you" (Matt. 21:31b). Rejecting a religion of escapism, soul-winners see saints in sinners and encounter them at every level of wickedness. So Jesus said, "Go, call thy husband..." (v. 16).

Soul-winning Requires Exposing Sin.

Conviction will not fall until you deal with the sin of the person you want to win. It will not do for you to talk about sin in general. You must talk about, and deal with, the sin of the person you are trying to win. It is not the world's sin that keeps the sinner from God, but his sin. If you are not dealing with that individual's sin, leading to a prayer of confession, you may be doing great damage. If there is no conviction of sin, there is no confession. If there is no confession, there is no forgiveness and cleansing. In this process of convicting a sinner, more often than not, the sinner will become perturbed, offended, or angry with you. Do not let this deter you. I once witnessed to a man. After I left, he said to his wife, "I never, ever want to see that preacher again." Three months later, I returned anyhow, and the man gave his heart to Jesus immediately and became my friend.

Soul-winning Requires Resisting Diversions.

The woman acknowledged her sin, but now, as the conversation was getting "too hot" for her, she introduced a controversial subject to change the conversation: "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship" (v. 20). When you get to the personal sin issue, the sinner gets nervous, and the devil gets nervous, and he puts in his last attack: his diversion is to change the subject. And the soul-winner who wants to be kind, and look good, and still be liked, will fall for the trap and go along with the diversion. Oh, how many have abandoned the course to win the lost by giving in to diversions?

Soul-winning Requires the Revelation of Christ.

"Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he" (v. 26). In the whole process of soul-winning, Christ must shine through you - his love, his compassion, his holiness, his firmness and kindness -- so that the sinner will be drawn into the kingdom. Yes, the Samaritan woman became the first Gentile missionary. Indeed, Solomon said, "...he that winneth souls is wise" (Prov. 11:30). May you be wiser from now on in this great calling of God.

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