

Personal Spiritual Growth Lesson 5B

Witnessing (Part 1)

Welcome to our final lesson of personal spiritual growth. This lesson will be focused on the topic or the discipline of witnessing. It's another way we can demonstrate the love of God toward the people God places in our lives..

Our love for God is demonstrated not only in the way we love people within the body of Christ, but how we love those who don't know Jesus yet. This lesson begins on page 45. As we begin, I'd like to look back to a promise that God made to Abraham. The whole message of the Bible is really about the kingdom of God.

God is the king, and he is looking to establish his kingdom that will be made up of people who love him, desire to worship him, live for him and honor him. God created Adam and Eve to be in perfect relationship with him. In Genesis 3, sin broke that relationship. The rest of the Bible is God's love story, his story of redemption to bring people back into relationship with him.

In the time of Noah, the world was turning away from God. Every thought of their heart and mind was only evil all the time. God brought a judgment on the earth through the flood. As Noah comes through the flood, he and his family were saved by grace through their faith in God and his promise of life.

By God's grace, they were called to go and multiply throughout the earth. In Genesis chapter 11, the people from the nations said, "no"! They said, we were going to build a tower to heaven and make a name for themselves. In response, God came down and confused their language. And that's why it was called the Tower of Babel.

At that point, God said, I'm not going to work in a general way through humanity. From this point forward, I'm going to work in a very specific way.

I'm going to call out a people of my very own, who would become the nation of Israel. And through them, the world will come to know the One True God. All the nations of the earth would have an opportunity to come back into relationship, to receive forgiveness of sin, receive a renewed relationship with God that would go on for eternity.

In Genesis chapter 12, God calls Abram. There was nothing special about Abram, it was all based on the grace of God. We read about this covenant, this unconditional promise that God makes with Abraham in Genesis chapter 12:1-3. Let's read it together.

"Now the Lord said to Abram, go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great. You will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you, I will curse and all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

This unconditional promise that God makes to Abraham is continued through Isaac and Jacob. This promise is ultimately fulfilled in the Lord Jesus who was the promised Messiah to come.

Psalm 67 looks ahead to the future when representatives from all the nations of the earth will bow before the Lord Jesus.

Psalm 67 says, “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us. That your way may be known on earth, you're saving power among all the nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God, let all the peoples praise you. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon the earth. Let the peoples praise you, O God, that all the peoples praise you. The earth has yielded its increase. God, our God shall bless us. God shall bless us, may all the ends of the earth fear him.”

In the book of Revelation there will be people from every tribe and tongue and nation and people group gathered around the throne, worshiping the Lamb. God has chosen to work through his people, work through his church, followers of Jesus to make known the mystery of the gospel.

People who are separated from God, under his wrath, dead in sin, can respond to this invitation of eternal life and forgiveness of sin. This is the role of the church. We are called to be God’s witnesses to a lost and perishing world. We are called to be Ambassadors for Christ, Ambassadors of reconciliation. On page 45, you can see a simple diagram with the words “cultivate, plant, and reap”.

This is a simple process for evangelism. It's very similar to the process in agriculture and farming.

How is this three-step process applied in farming?

Before you can plant, there is work that needs to be done to cultivate the ground. The field must be prepared by removing the rocks, burning the stubble in advance of the rainy season. At the right time, as the rains are getting ready to come, seeds must be planted. The more seed that is planted, the greater the possibility of a larger harvest. Much effort goes into weeding the fields during the growing season. Farmers are trusting God to bring rain and sun. And at just the right time, there will be a harvest. There will be a time to reap. A time of rejoicing. This takes time. It is a process. The process of evangelism is very similar.

The process of evangelism requires time to cultivate relationships, to build relationships with others. And as we care for people, there are opportunities to begin to pray for them. God then opens doors.

God is the one who opens doors for the message. Love is the motivating factor. The Bible says that Christ’s love must compel us. Relationships may start slowly. We share words of encouragement. Maybe a verse from the Bible. We learn of needs and we respond in practical, loving ways. This is all part of cultivating and planting. Others may come along and water these seeds. In God’s timing the gospel may be shared. We trust the Holy Spirit to convict of sin and open eyes to see who Jesus is so that others may put their trust in Jesus. When the gospel is shared, we pray that this seed lands on good soil. We understand that some seed may land on the path, some on the rocks, and still others among the weeds. We are called to cultivate and sow the seed. God is responsible for the harvest.

The gospel message must be clear. What is this message?

Christ died for our sins. He was buried. He was resurrected. He ascended into heaven. He holds out the free gift of eternal life and forgiveness of sin. The gospel is meant to transform lives. When we share the truth of the gospel in love flowing out of a life transformed by the gospel, this is the most effective form of witnessing.

The message is shared from lives that are being conformed into the likeness of Christ. We talked about in the last lesson. In Acts 2, we are given a picture of the early church, a fertile field for evangelism to thrive.

On page 45, I will read Acs 2:42-47 and we will make a few observations related to a church focused on witnessing for Christ.

“They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

What do we observe in this passage?

There are characteristics of a healthy church that we wouldn't want to miss. These are still relevant today.

- There was spiritual leadership in the form of the apostles. Today we have elders and pastors.
- There was a devotion to the word of God.
- A devotion to the fellowship of love within the church, in the body of Christ.
- A devotion to the breaking of bread. This is probably a reference to communion, remembering Christ's death and burial and resurrection until he comes again
- A devotion to prayer.
- Worship was lived out. People were filled with awe because of the power God.
- People were generous. They shared everything they had with others. Nobody had any needs. They sold property and possessions. They were committed to each other.
- They continued to meet together, to study, to live life together, to serve together.
- They met in large groups like we do on Sunday mornings. They met in homes throughout the week in smaller groups to encourage and support each other.
- They earned the trust and favor of the community.
- There was a blessing. God's grace was overflowing from this group of believers into the world around them.
- As a result, God was opening doors for the message of the gospel to be shared.
- The Lord added to their number daily, those who are being saved. God is the one who brings about growth.

We see this throughout the New Testament church. Paul planted, Apollos watered it, but God brought the growth. Some are called to sow the seed in one season and others may have the joy of reaping in another season. Jesus made this point in John 4 with the Samaritan woman at the well and the people of Samaria who responded to Jesus in larger numbers. God is the one who opens eyes, draws people to himself, and sparks new life within. People are saved by grace through faith in the message of the gospel.

A healthy approach to evangelism may be as simple as this three-step process of care, prayer, and share.

As you begin to care for people, getting to know them, and meeting needs, this leads to opportunities to pray with them.

You pray for God to open their eyes to the love of Jesus. People understand how much you love them and how much they are loved by God. God opens the door to share the gospel with them.

This process of witnessing often flows out of building relationships with people through care, prayer, and then share. Jesus calls us in Matthew 4:19, to follow him, and he will make us fishers of men. He will transform us and equip us to be witnesses.

In Acts 1, we are told that we receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon us and we will be his witnesses. This was true of the early church and it is still true today. A witness is called to tell the truth of what he or she has seen or experienced.

We are called to testify to the truth of what we know, what has taken place in our life, and who Jesus is, and how people can come to a relationship with God through faith in Christ.

Second Corinthians 5:18-20, tells us that we are ambassadors. It says, "all this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors. And God is making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God."

Without Christ, we are enemies of God. Through the death of Christ, God's attitude towards us was changed. We are no longer enemies in the sight of God. We came to a place to be savable because of what Jesus had accomplished through his death for sin in our place. All that remains is for each of us to respond to the invitation, to be reconciled to God.

We have been given this message of reconciliation and this ministry of reconciliation. We are ambassadors for Jesus.

What is an ambassador? An ambassador is someone who represents the president of a country. During wartime we are representing our country in an enemy land. That's very similar to the role of the church in the world today.

Our citizenship is in heaven. God has left us here as strangers and aliens to be ambassadors for him. Our message is to let people who are enemies of God, know that there is a path to

peace. They can be reconciled to God. That's really at the heart of evangelism, this call to be a witness, a call to be ambassador.

J.I. Packer says, "Evangelism is to present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to sinful people in order that they may come to put their trust in God through him, to receive him as their savior and serve him as their king in the fellowship of his church."

Turn to page 46. There is often confusion about the gospel.

If you ask random people to define the gospel, some people say the gospel is the Word of God. Others say the gospel is the love of God. Still others may say that it is what Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote.

Defining the gospel is critical.

1 Corinthians 15:1 – 4 provides a short summary. The apostle Paul says to the church in Corinth, "now brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel that I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you, otherwise you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance."

Now here's the gospel in a nutshell, "that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day again according to the scriptures. It goes on to tell us that Jesus was seen. He was seen by individuals. He was seen by the apostles. He was seen even at one point by more than 500 people at one time."

That's the gospel.

We must never get distracted. Paul said even if an angel would come to you and preach a different gospel, let them be condemned. The gospel of God is specific.

We need to be clear.

We can't water it down.

We can't distort it in any way.

The gospel speaks of the death of Christ.

Why did he die?

For our sins because our sins have separated us from the Holy God.

He was our substitute on the cross. He took our place.

How do we know?

Because the scriptures say it.

What's the proof that he died? Christ was buried.

Christ was also raised from the dead, just as he said he would be.

He was raised on the third day. How do we know?

The Scriptures tell us this truth.

What is the proof? Jesus was seen. He was seen by individuals. He was seen by the apostles.

He was seen by more than 500 at one given time.

Never get distracted from the heart of the gospel. We must be clear, fearless, bold, and communicate in love.

Many will talk about a sinless gospel, a cross-less gospel, a bloodless gospel.

There is a gospel today that says trust in Jesus and your life will be great.

There is no reference to sin. There is no emphasis on the sacrifice of Jesus. It's almost a humanistic kind of gospel. Jesus is not our Savior but rather just a good example.

He's not just an example. He is our substitute. He is our savior.

Throughout the Book of Acts there are 10 sermons. The gospel is repeated in each of these sermons.

What is emphasized?

- The sinfulness of man
- The substitutionary death of Christ
- The burial of Christ
- The resurrection of Christ
- The ascension of Christ
- Forgiveness of sin
- The indwelling power of the Holy Spirit
- The return of Jesus
- The call to live for Jesus.

These elements are repeated throughout the book of Acts.

There are things that may hinder our ability to evangelize, to do what God has called us to do.

Look at page 46.

Sometimes we have the wrong definition of success.

We think that we are responsible for saving people. No, we are just called to be faithful witnesses. God is responsible for the results. He is the one who brings the growth. We are just called to be faithful. We never save anyone. God calls us to share the gospel, to plant the seed. And we trust God to be the one who's drawing people to Jesus and the Holy Spirit stripping scales away to open the eyes of people to see who Jesus really is. When you do an evangelistic campaign, our heart's desire is for people to put their trust in Jesus, but the success or failure of that campaign is not how many people trusted Jesus. We have no control over that. God is saying, just be faithful, faithfully communicate the good news, faithfully communicate the gospel, trust God for the results.

We often rely on the wrong source of power.

We know that the power comes from the Holy Spirit. It is not in our ability to communicate. We don't trust in the gospel tool we are using. We trust in God and the the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation. God's word is powerful. The power is not in our words or in our personality or our ability to communicate. The power is the Holy Spirit of God, working in hearts to draw people to Christ. People who are dead in sin can be made alive as they respond in faith to the invitation of the gospel.

We often minimize God's work of grace in our lives.

God has given each of us a personal story of his grace in our lives that we are able to share. In 1 Timothy 1, Paul testified that he was the worst of sinners. He shared what his life was like before Christ and how he was transformed by the grace of God through Christ. Our testimonies can be used of God to communicate the gospel. As I started this lesson, when our lives are lived by God's grace through the power of the Holy Spirit and are in alignment with the gospel message, this becomes a powerful testimony.

We may not be equipped to share the gospel.

1 Peter 3 says, "we should always be prepared to give an answer for the reason, for the hope that we have." How do we get prepared? Well, number one is to be a Christian, to put your trust in Christ, to be working out our salvation, to be training ourselves for godliness.

Your life will not be perfect, but it will reflect the character of Christ, more of the fruit of the spirit of love and joy and peace and patience and so forth. There's an understanding of gospel and the key verses that support this message.

- God loves them,
- their sin has separated them from God,
- God loved us so much that he sent his son to die on the cross in their place,
- Jesus died and was raised from the dead,
- God offers the free gift of eternal life,
- we can become a new creation in him.
- as a result, we continue to grow through the reading of the bible and praying, serving and doing all these wonderful things that never save.
- when we die, we are confident that we will spend eternity with God in heaven, not because of the good things we have done, but because of the finished work that Jesus accomplished on the cross.

As witnesses, we must be intentional to spend time around lost people. Colossians 4:2-6 makes that point as we're devoting ourselves to prayer, we're making the most of every opportunity, we're being wise in the way we act towards people who don't know Jesus yet. Our conversation is always full of grace and seasoned with salt as that passage explains. The doors that God often opens come through questions. People may ask about different aspects of our life. They may ask about out marriages and families? They may ask how we endured hardship and trial with a sense of joy and peace.

And when these questions come, they are opportunities to share the hope that we have in Christ, how he has saved us and how he's continuing to transform us.

Charles Spurgeon once said, "If I never won souls, I would sigh till I did. I would break my heart over them if I could not break their hearts. Though I can understand the possibility of an earnest sower never reaping, I cannot understand the possibility of an earnest sower being content not to reap. I cannot comprehend any one of you Christian people trying to win souls and not having results and being satisfied without them."

What he's saying is God is responsible for the results, but our desire should be for people to put their trust in Christ. There should be an expectation when the gospel is shared, people will come to repentance and put their trust in Jesus. Our hearts should break for the lost until they respond to the gospel.

On page 47, you can see there are many different ways to share the gospel.

We will touch on just a few when we continue with part 2 of this lesson.