



Spiritual Disciplines: Witnessing

Walking with Jesus

iFOLLOW

The iFollow Discipleship Series

About the iFollow Discipleship Series Pastor's Edition

Categories

The iFollow Discipleship Series is designed to be used in congregations to assist people in their pursuit of God. This assumes that individuals are in unique places in their journey and there is no perfect set of lessons that everyone must complete to become a disciple—in fact discipleship is an eternal journey. Therefore the iFollow curriculum is a menu of milestones that an individual, small group, or even an entire church can choose from. The lessons can be placed in three general categories: **Meeting with Jesus** (does not assume a commitment to Jesus Christ); **Walking with Jesus** (assumes an acceptance of Jesus Christ); and **Working with Jesus** (assumes a desire to serve Jesus Christ).

Components

Each lesson has a presenter's manuscript which can be read word for word, but will be stronger if the presenter puts it in his/her own words and uses personal illustrations. The graphic slides can be played directly from the Pastor's DVD or customized and played from a computer. There are also several group activities and discussion questions to choose from as well as printable student handouts.

Usage

The lessons are designed to be used in small groups, pastor's Bible classes, prayer meetings, seminars, retreats, training sessions, discussion groups, and some lessons may be appropriate sermon outlines.

Credits

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The Spritual Discipline of Witnessing

This presentation is designed for people who have decided to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Learning Objectives

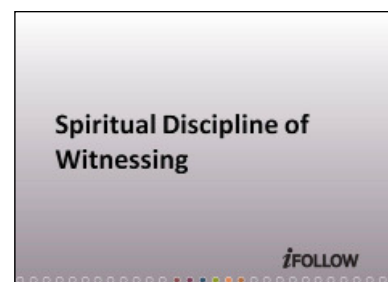
1. The Bible definition of a witness
2. Why do we share our faith? What is our goal?
3. Some attitudes that can help or hinder our witness
4. Some different styles of sharing, both public and private
5. Choosing a method
6. Knowing when to speak and when to keep silent

Content Outline

1. A Bible study on the term “witness”
2. Seven key texts on Christian witness
3. A message of changed lives and forgiveness
4. Paul, a major New Testament example
5. Witnesses tell their own stories
6. Pushy witnessing often caused by fear for the person
7. Witnessing mistakes contrasted with the fruit of the Spirit
8. Public and private evangelism; some suggestions for finding your niche and some cautions for dangerous territory

Background Material for the Presenter

John is the Bible writer who most uses the term “witness,” though Paul uses it many times as well. Most of the mentions of witness in the three synoptic gospels are about false witness. However, in John 1, John the Baptist is four times called a witness of the Light coming into the world in Jesus. In later chapters, Jesus calls Himself a witness to the truth, and accuses His hearers of refusing His witness. He also says, in John 5:31-36 and in 8:18, that God bears witness to Him, not He to Himself, and that if one does not want to believe God,



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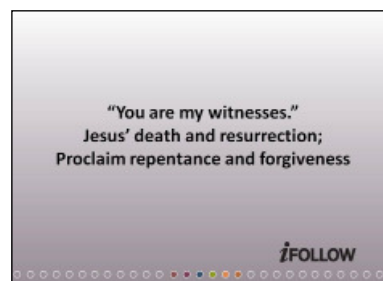
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one should at least believe the witness of Jesus' life and works. In the epistles 1 John and 3 John, again it is usually Jesus whom John calls the witness. In Revelation, Jesus is the Faithful and True Witness.

John also says he and the other disciples "bear witness" to what they have seen and heard and touched, especially in 1 John 1:1. It sounds as if people have been scoffing at this old apostle's stories. "I was there!" he insists. "You can believe or not, as you choose, but I know what I saw and heard. I touched Glory with my own hands." Peter, too, says he is a witness "of the sufferings of Christ," in 1 Peter 5:1.

And so we come to Acts and the early church, source of the word Christians have made a verb today. Witnesses to Jesus and His truth, witnesses to the gospel. We all want to be one, but what does it mean? Would you believe that with very few exceptions, every time Paul uses the term, he is speaking of God or the Holy Spirit bearing witness to us? None of the exceptions are about what we would term "Christian witnessing" today. Yet Paul is one of the greatest and most effective witnesses in history!



Seven Key Texts

There seem to be seven key texts concerning Christian witness or testimony. Let's take a closer look at each.

1. Luke 24:48

In this passage, the risen Jesus tells His disciples, "You are witnesses of these things." We believe this passage includes us today. Witnesses of what? The context is of Jesus coming upon His frightened friends and having to prove to them (again) that He is not a ghost. Then he "opens their minds concerning Scripture," (verse 45), and tells them:

"Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Verses 47-49

What were they witnesses of? His suffering, death, and resurrection. Repentance and forgiveness in Jesus' name. The "promise of My Father" is clearly the Holy Spirit, which

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Jesus had promised several times before His death, but first there is a necessary retreat. They are to stay in the city until they “are clothed with power from on high.”

Are we witnesses to His sufferings and death? Only second-hand ones. Our testimony would not stand in a court of law. “Hearsay,” the judge would say. But what about repentance and forgiveness? What about His resurrection? Are we witnesses to these?

It is entirely possible—indeed, essential—for a Christian today to be a personal witness of the resurrection power of Jesus. Yet far too many of us are not. We are still only hearsay witnesses. Our friend said it. Our mother and father told us. Our pastor preaches about it. We trust all these people; they are faithful witnesses. Surely they speak the truth. And so we go and tell others what we believe to be true, and are discouraged by the results. We’ve missed a step, perhaps two. Have we truly taken a good look at our lives, repented, and become personally acquainted with God’s unlimited forgiveness? If so, we most assuredly have something to share, something that tends to overflow in direct proportion to the amount of forgiveness we’ve received. (“She was forgiven much, so she loves much,” Jesus said about the repentant woman at His feet. See Luke 7:47.)

Once this miracle has happened in our lives, there is still another step before we are as powerful witnesses as God wants us to be. We must wait to be “clothed with power from on high.”

We know the disciples had only ten more days to wait. But there is no indication they knew that. “Wait,” said Jesus. So they did. Did they ask each other what it might mean to be clothed with heavenly power, and how they would know when they were?

When it happened, they knew.

And they immediately began a) telling the story of the suffering, death, and resurrection they had seen, and b) *proclaiming forgiveness*. Peter’s first sermon, on Pentecost Sunday, was about God’s grace and mercy. (Acts 2:22, 38, 39)

Do we wait until we are clothed with power from on high? Or do we rush out to perform the next New Method?

2. John 15:26, 27

This is a humbling passage. Jesus again says that the disciples will testify because they have been with Him from the beginning. Once again, they seem to have a major advantage over us, because we indubitably did not walk with Jesus of Nazareth for the three and a half years of His earthly ministry. But notice the company they’re in!

“When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning.”

That’s almost scary. The Spirit’s testimony and the disciples’ are set side by side, as if they are similar. Are we included in that? “As one born too late,” like Paul? We believe we are. And if, in fact, we wait for the Spirit to go first, we will not only be unafraid, but we will be given words to say. Matthew 10 doesn’t use the term “witness,” but Jesus does tell the disciples that they will teach about Him, and in verses 19 and 20 He reassures them that they are not to worry what to say, as the Spirit will speak for them. So it’s teamwork, and the burden is not on us, but on God, who has broad shoulders indeed.

3. Acts 1:22

The disciples are in the Upper Room after Jesus’ ascension, and are seeking to fill Judas’ place among the twelve. They say, “It has to be somebody who was with us the whole time.” It appears as if they, too, think those who didn’t know Jesus personally had a disadvantage, because in fact, many Bible scholars over the centuries, Ellen White among them, suspect God really intended to choose Saul of Tarsus, of all people, as the twelfth apostle, and he had never met Jesus. Until one day on the road to Damascus.

The disciples would have thought it was an insane idea. Ananias, who lived in Damascus, was a brave follower of God when he agreed, not without surprise and trepidation, to go and lay hands on this terrorist, and ordain him for the ministry of God. The story is in Acts 9, and in verse 19 it says Saul stayed with the disciples in Damascus, so it would appear that Ananias, and probably Judas of Straight Street, also helped to train him for his work. These two passages, taken together, show us that even we who have not met Jesus face to face can be and are anointed as His witnesses. And what do we proclaim? Changed lives and forgiveness!

4. Acts 4:33

The latter part of Acts 4 is very similar to Acts 2. It describes the people of God being shaken by and filled with the Holy Spirit, and then proclaiming the word of God with boldness. They live in close community, share their possessions, and spread the word of “the resurrection” and “abundant grace.”

We’re beginning to see a pattern here. The people come together to pray, the Spirit

moves in power, and they start talking about resurrection and change and grace. When we witness, what do we most often talk about?

5-7. Acts 22:15, 23:11, and 26:16-18

These passages are all instances of Paul being told by Jesus, “You are My witness.” In the first, Paul is telling the story of Ananias coming to him and reporting that God has chosen Paul to be His witness “to all men of what you have seen and heard.” Paul can’t tell stories about walking with Jesus day by day and seeing Him feed thousands, or calm the storm, or heal a blind man. But Paul has personally seen Jesus change thousands (he used to think they were crazy and worthy of imprisonment, they were so changed!) He has experienced the hand of the risen Lord calming his own inner storm and turning him around 180 degrees. He has been blind—in more ways than one—and healed. In fact, it’s possible that the “thorn in the flesh” that Paul later begs to be freed from is poor sight left over from his traumatic meeting with Jesus. Some of the strongest disciples need reminders of their own weakness in order to stay humble.

In the second passage, Paul receives a vision in which Jesus tells him that as he has witnessed in Jerusalem, so he must do in Rome. It’s by way of being reassured that those who are out for his blood won’t succeed, but Paul knows if he gets to Rome he’ll probably die there instead. He’s all right with that. Wherever he is, dead or alive, he’s with Jesus. That’s all that matters to Paul.

And in 26:16-18, he’s telling the story again, this time to King Agrippa. In more detail than before, he reports that Jesus told him on the Damascus road:

“But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen but also to the things in which I will appear to you; rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles to whom I am sending you, to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.”

This passage bears closer study.

The Purpose of a Witness

So we see that all these passages have as their center the message of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, forgiveness in His name, and changed lives. We have even seen the whole story in the life of someone who thought he was following God when he set out to destroy this new and disruptive “Way.” Saul had heard the preaching. He

had stood by and seen Stephen bear eloquent witness to God and His grace, yet he had refused to listen. There was nothing any disciple could do for Saul at this point. It was up to the Holy Spirit. Saul had to meet Jesus for himself.

When he did, he had a choice how to respond to that visitation. He could have picked himself up, dusted himself off, (hired a guide), and continued his rampage. But he didn't. He started praying. And now that he was softened, God called some of His disciples to talk to Saul. Judas took him in. Ananias touched him and brought God's comfort, healing, and commission to him. The group kept him with them, no doubt told him their stories, and were the first to hear his. Now that Saul (now Paul) knew about repentance by personal experience, now that he understood changed life, now that he was forgiven (a miracle he never got over), now he *turned around* (the literal translation of "repented") and began spreading the news he'd learned.

What is the goal of a faithful witness? By definition, a witness simply tells the truth. It isn't the witness's business to convince or convict. Legally, that's the lawyer's job. Spiritually, it's the Holy Spirit's job. In these stories, the main task of witnesses seems to be to tell stories. Not hearsay stories, but ones the witness has seen with his or her own eyes. The early Christians told the story of Jesus, especially the last week of His life. They might say sadly, "I was one of the ones shouting at Him, cursing Him." Then, through their tears, they could glow with the joy of being able to say, "He forgave me! He loves me! It's unbelievable!" Paul could and did say, "I am the chief of sinners. I used to kill people for believing in Jesus! But thanks be to God, Jesus delivered me from this body of death!"

Witnesses also answered questions. Jesus said, "You were with me from the beginning." His closest friends could say, "Yes, He really did say He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life. We didn't understand it. I'm not sure I do now! But my life is different."

James or John could answer the question, "I get so angry! What can I do about my bad temper?"

Peter could answer someone who wanted to know, "How can I keep from getting cowardly and running away from trials?"

If somebody was curious about how to believe without seeing, he could ask Thomas.

And surely the new converts wondered, "Since He's gone now, how can I know Him?"

Then the Christians could explain about the Holy Spirit. The thing is, they didn't stop with explaining *about* the Holy Spirit. Those who were with Jesus on His last night could say a lot about that subject. They could list knowledgeably, "convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment." (John 16:8) They could expound on the Spirit manifesting Jesus to the world. It was such an exciting subject that they probably did talk a lot about it. But then they'd say, "You can have the Holy Spirit

living in you, too! Shall we ask Him?” They’d pray there and then—we have lots of stories showing that.

You can’t pass on your faith, not even to your children. But you can point to the Holy Spirit, who is present everywhere, all the time, loves all the people all the time, and will always come when asked. The magic of it is, when the Spirit enters in, “taking what is Jesus’ and disclosing it to us,” (John 16:14), then the new believer begins to have a very personal life with Christ, too. And can, in turn, pass on the news and pray with someone else.

If our methods, programs, plans, seminars and courses are to introduce people to Jesus, they must be centered on proclaiming the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, changed lives, and the abundant grace of forgiveness. That’s contagious.

One thoughtful definition of witnessing calls it “offering Christ to those outside our doors.”

Just offering. That’s all. Jesus died for your and my freedom to believe or not to. We violate that freedom when we try to insist and convince. God loves that person even more than we can, and He has a thousand ways. All He wants is for us to tell our stories.

Living Our Stories

There has to be more to it than just telling stories, doesn’t there? Well, yes, there is. We have to *live* our daily God-stories. We have to “walk the talk.” How often do we take this to mean that we have to keep close tabs on some list of rules, and how well we are keeping them? How often do we think if we’re not going door to door and asking people if they want Bible studies, we’re not “witnessing”? In one sermon, the speaker read Isa. 58:6, 7 and equated loosing the bonds of wickedness and breaking yokes with that very thing. Door-to-door Bible studies. Dare it be said that insisting that everyone be giving Bible studies is making another kind of yoke, one Jesus didn’t make?

Is there one single story of Jesus knocking on any door and offering a Bible study? He used the methods of His day, beginning in the synagogues, and then taking His message to the hillsides. People were free to come to Him or not. If they came, whether to His door in the middle of the night or hunting Him down when He was in need of a break, He was ready for them, and never turned them away. But He never hunted anyone down, nor did He ever once say anything harsh or judgmental except to one particular group of people—religious leaders who put burdens on the people that they were not willing to bear themselves (Matt. 23:4) and steadfastly refused to accept anything Jesus had to say. That’s it. No one else. Occasionally He said, “Don’t sin anymore, or worse will happen.” That was *after* He had already rescued the person, no questions asked, from the consequences of said sin.

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Why is it, then, that we so often get caught up in nagging, judgmental carping or arguing instead of bearing witness to changed lives and abundant grace of forgiveness? Two reasons jump to mind. One is that we are surrounded by people we love dearly, who don't see what we see, don't think they need any changes in their lives, and don't feel a need for forgiveness. We *were* loving and friendly and kind the first and even the tenth time we tried to talk to them about godly subjects. Now they don't want to hear it anymore. And they're smart, good people. It's frustrating.

But worse than that, it's frightening. What if my child is not in heaven? What if my wife never gives her heart to God? Will my mother burn in the flames outside the New Jerusalem? These are very real fears, and they are nightmarish. They are enough to make anyone want to redouble their efforts to convince, to restate, to urge, to desperately plead.

"God," said Paul, who knew the feeling well, "has not given us a spirit of fear." (1 Tim. 1:7) We can take the fears and the tears to Jesus. He loves our loved one more than we can imagine. And if anything is ever going to turn their eyes to Jesus, it won't be our nagging, judging, fear, or anger. They, like Saul of Tarsus, have to meet Jesus for themselves. It may not be through us, either. But there are two things we can do, and they are both absolutely vital.

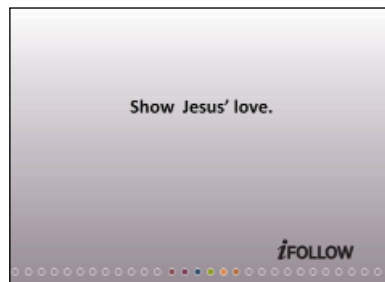
We can pray. Hell has no power that can hold a candle to the prayer of a mother, father, sister, brother, friend who faithfully and steadfastly holds someone in the light of God's love.

We can show the love of Jesus. Yes, we really can. We can breathe in the Holy Spirit and ask for just that winning, irresistible, charisma of love that surrounded the Son of God when He walked here. In fact, He can walk here now, on our feet. He can touch others with our hands. He can speak in our voices.

We can check our attitudes against His.

Fruit vs. Nuts

Probably the quintessential description of the perfect Christian attitude is in Gal.



5:22, 23a. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”

Love is the fruit. Love is God, God is love, love is all. The rest of these attitudes are different facets of the love of God that the Holy Spirit grows in our lives. When it comes to sharing our faith, these attitudes are more fruitful than we can imagine. And when we honestly contrast these spiritual fruits with some of our common attitudes, the difference is downright, well, nutty! It’s important to realize that when we catch ourselves displaying the following unfruitful attitudes, there is no need to beat ourselves up. We get afraid and angry, and sometimes we hurt each other. We don’t mean to. If we take a look, with some judicious perspective and occasionally a dose of humor, maybe we can short-circuit our “old selves,” take a deep, fresh breath of God’s love, and try again.

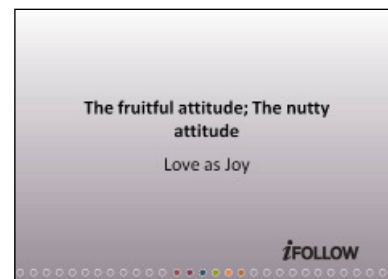
A Personal Experience

I heard something so startling and mind-altering recently that I wrote it in my journal and have been contemplating it ever since. It was an injunction from a pastor to look, every day, for God in the faces of others. Christians are often reminded we are the only Bible some people read, so *they* should be able to see God in *our* faces. We are urged to allow the Spirit to use our words, our hands and feet, to help us somehow *be* Jesus in the world. When we witness, our first and highest desire is to show at least a glimpse, obscured though it may be, of the face of God.

I wonder what would happen if we really put this into practice? What if, instead of looking for ways to share what we have of Jesus with others, we looked for the ways we can find glimpses of Jesus in *them*, and then affirmed and encouraged those glimpses? First, we’d gain in unimaginable ways. Lots of people have more of Jesus in them than I do, and this attitude would remind me of that, and short circuit any tendency to think of myself as the Great Evangelist. Then, in cases where people aren’t aware of God in their lives, the ones we’d most want to share with, isn’t it possible we’d end up sharing more of Jesus than we could have imagined, and without their feeling like we had a hidden agenda?

What if we recognized, every time we had a chance to share our faith, that we have as much to learn from the other person as she has to learn from us? I wonder what would happen.

Joy: The disciples, Luke tells us in Acts 13:52, were “continually filled with joy.” When we think about all they faced, all they had to go through, that’s kind of surprising. And



it's in stark contrast to some of our attempts to share God's love.

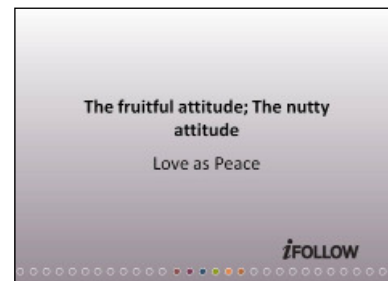
Jason is a worrier. His sisters are no longer attending church, and have begun to display actions in their lives that make Jason fear they do not have close relationships with God. When he is with them, he tries to find ways to bring conversations around to things he knows are important—church attendance, daily worship and devotions, healthy diet. He doesn't want to be judgmental, so he says things like, "You know I love you, but. . ." and "I'm not trying to be pushy, it's just that. . ." His sisters start to frown and roll their eyes. Freeze frame. If heaven took a picture of Jason's face right this second, would there be joy? What about his sisters' faces? What is the result of Jason's well-intended witnessing attempt?

What would happen if Jason first cultivated God's joy in his life, praised God in his prayers every night for his sisters' health and generosity and liveliness? What if he then spent his time with them hunting for anything in them that reminded him of God and showed his joy in those things?

It's still tricky. If he says, "Your flute-playing takes me straight to heaven!" his sister may think he's trying to get in a dig, especially if he's set up a preaching-type mindset. At first he might not be able to mention God or heaven at all. But if he affirms and encourages every sign of love he sees in them, especially when he can honestly be grateful for things they've done for him directly, he may find doors opening and the Holy Spirit developing more love in them. (And him.) After all, all good things come from God. All of them. God is already at work in those thousand ways Jason knows nothing of. We can ask ourselves: Would it be effective for someone to worry **me** into heaven? When I witness, does the joy show?

Peace: "Righteousness and peace have kissed each other." (Psalm 85:10) Sharon knows her friend Rose **knows** about the Sabbath. She is sure if she can just put the arguments logically enough, convincingly enough, Rose will eventually "come to the truth." The problem is, lately it's getting to the point that Rose doesn't even like spending time with Sharon anymore. She certainly doesn't want to come to church with her.

When the angels watch over this friendship, do they see peace? Do they see a love that clings to peace even when it's hard, knowing that God loves Rose and Rose loves God, and conviction is the Holy Spirit's job? What if Sharon stopped asking Rose to church and went to church with Rose instead, looking for every chance she has to

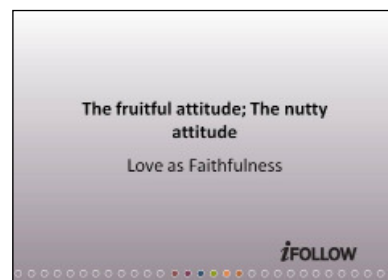
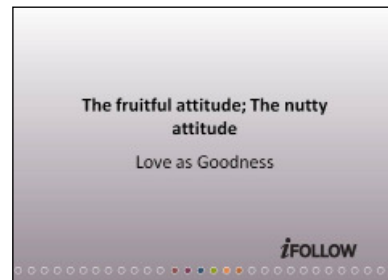
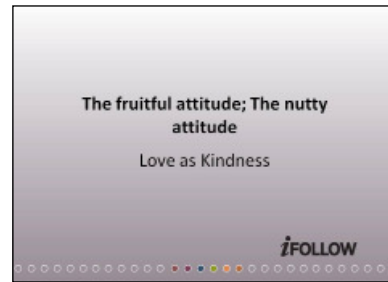


agree with what she finds there, and learning to love her friend and her friend's friends? We can ask ourselves, When I witness, does the peace show?

Patience: "Here is the patience of the saints ..." (Rev. 14:12) We've all heard the stories of the wife who patiently, silently, over years, even decades, prays for her husband. Loves him, is a companion to him, interests herself in his interests, and talks to her friends about what a good man he is. We've also heard the stories where the wife is judge, jury, and executioner, sure that her husband is under the frown of heaven and losing no chance to tell him so. Let's say, for the sake of argument, both of these husbands die without visibly giving their hearts to God, so far as human watchers know. Just at a guess, which one has the better chance of surprising us by meeting his wife in the air on the way to King Jesus? When we witness, does the patience show?

Kindness: "In your godliness, [supply] brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Peter 1:7, 8) Brother Aaron is one of the pillars of his church. He is the Keeper of the Lists. That is to say, Brother Aaron knows who has done what, when, and where for the past twenty years. He keeps track of who *really* pays "a full tithe," and who watches what on television. He is also able (and willing) to list to his neighbors and relatives just which parts of God's law they are breaking and what they should do about it. Brother Aaron is fond of mentioning 1 John 1:9, the first part, about making confession of sin, and something about "weeping between the porch and the altar." No one knows quite what he means by this, and furthermore, no one has any intention of asking. If the conference gets a letter, detailing its own shortcomings or those of its constituents, it may have come from Brother Aaron. If you asked, Brother Aaron would say he is a faithful witness for the Lord. When we witness, does the kindness show?

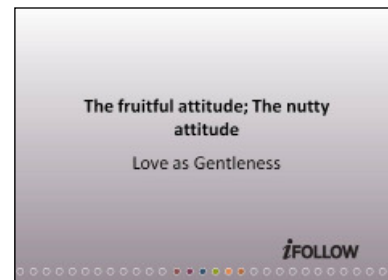
Goodness: "For the fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth." (Eph. 5:9) The family who were burned out of their home were closely related to a preacher. They had been talked to, preached to and taught until they no longer heard



a word he said. They let it be known in no uncertain terms that they were not interested in church, God, or anything to do with either.

Then the fire came. A local church mobilized to find them places to stay, help them deal with insurance hassles, replace clothes and necessities, and clean up the mess. There were ears to listen to their story, over and over again, shoulders to cry on, arms to hold those who had lost irreplaceable things like childhood mementoes and family photos. That was the church they joined. When we witness, does God's goodness show through?

Faithfulness: "He who promised is faithful." (Heb. 10:23) "All your sons will be taught of the Lord, and the well-being of your sons will be great." (Isa. 54:13) Henry and Louise tried to raise their kids right. They had worship with them, took them to church, taught them principles of health. They can imagine no greater heartache than to watch their children turn away from God. There are no easy answers to this. God gave us free will, and He will never force anyone to accept Him. But we know one thing—nagging will not save our children. And reminding is nagging. Yes. Reminding. Just once. That's nagging.



God has given us promises like the one above. He loves our children. He knows what's really in the bottom of their hearts, where we can never see. Let's practice faith—not just in God, but in our kids, and everyone else to whom we witness. Can we find things that remind us of God in them and affirm those? When we witness, does our faith show, both in God and in the intelligence and discernment of the person to whom we're speaking?

Gentleness: "Be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men." (Titus 3:2) Maria is one of the strongest Bible students in her church. She has been studying the Bible since childhood, and knows the Scriptures backward and forward. If someone has a question about where a particular thing is found, they ask Maria. She can "rightly divide the word of truth" and is a favorite teacher and Sabbath school super-intendant. And Maria loves God with all her heart, and would dearly love for every person on the planet to come to the realization that God loves them.

So Maria had a hard time the evening she went with the pastor to study with a family who were trying to figure out a difficult Bible truth. The husband kept bringing up one text after another and trying to use them in a way they had never been intended to be used. The wife was an able assistant in trying to bolster clear error with the misuse of these texts! Why, then, was the pastor so quiet? Why did he just smile and

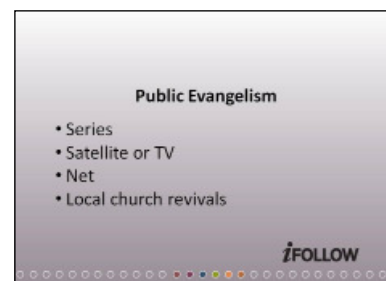


look interested, as if he were waiting for them to teach him? As if he agreed, almost! “Really?” he would say meekly, and read the text with interest.

“Well, that’s not exactly what I’m looking for,” the husband would mutter, flipping the pages of the Bible. The Holy Spirit was busy, and Maria managed to take her cue from her pastor and stay quiet, too. By the end of the evening, the family had taught themselves the truth, to their own amazement. But it was Maria who felt she’d learned the most. When we witness are we gentle, peaceable, teachable? Or do we already know it all?

Self-Control: “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.” (Psalm 141:3) “Preach the gospel at all times. When necessary, use words,” said Francis of Assisi. Sometimes, like Maria, we need to realize that the most important thing we can say is nothing at all. Love may show best when it’s not obscured with words. There is no way for this presentation or any presentation, or even the Bible itself to teach us when to speak and when to be silent. Only the Holy Spirit knows the heart of the one we are trying to reach, and if we are not in daily, hourly, momently contact with that Spirit, we’d better be silent indeed! There is no such thing as sharing of faith by one who cannot listen to the guidance of God.

We will mess up, of course, and speak when we shouldn’t have, and not speak when we should have. We will have to ask the forgiveness of God and of the other person. Believe it or not, those moments of vulnerability and human frailty can sometimes be just the moments the other person may be waiting to hear. When they see us fall and fail they learn whether we really do believe that Jesus died for *our* sins, that forgiveness and abundant grace are truly available for us, and for them. If we try to hide our frailties out of some mistaken idea that we will weaken their fledgling faith, then what they learn is that we are not authentic people after all. Because, make no mistake, they do know we’re faulty. Our masks aren’t that good! And if we can’t own up to our stumbles and humbly ask forgiveness, then why should they listen to anything we say, especially about a God we claim has infinite love and forgiveness?



Witnessing Styles, Public and Private

From Noah, to Jesus, to Peter, to Charles Wesley, evangelists have shared the Word in the open air, before thousands. Until nearly the 20th century, these were the largest public evangelism events because they were automatically limited to the reach of an unaided human voice.

In the 19th century, during the time the Seventh-day Adventist church was being or-

ganized, churches were perfecting the system of predetermined series of evangelistic “events.” A gifted writer wrote a series of sermons on a selected list of Bible topics or doctrines. A charismatic speaker, probably the same person, preached these sermons, perhaps aided by charts and illustrations. This system was enormously successful in a time when Chatauquas and open-air concerts and other such events were the only place to go other than home. They only got bigger when voice amplification systems were invented.

By the second half of the 20th century, these events were much less successful, at least in the developed western world. People had too much to do already, too many places to go. Churches looked around at the culture in which they worked, and came up with satellite-aided evangelistic series. These, too, were very successful, though possibly more so in less developed countries. As the Information Age continued, Internet and other online resources proliferated.

Of course, in a very real way, local churches are “doing evangelism” each week, and they may also create local revivals, often a week long, for their region. Or they may do seminars relating to health or family issues. If they first determine what their local neighborhood feels its needs and interests to be, they will be more successful. They may also have websites, e-newsletters, or Bible correspondence courses.

So today, there are as many large or small, organized, public methods of evangelism as imaginative people can come up with. There are also numberless ways to become involved with these. One can go from praying for them to donating money or passing out flyers, (and praying for them); from inviting friends or ushering at meetings to helping with the presentation by giving the prayer, singing or playing special music, (and praying for them); from being the speaker, presenting material from a preformatted seminar or series to going to seminary and training to become a public evangelist. And praying!

But what is it that makes these group efforts succeed? (Besides and along with prayer?) First of all, we have to define “succeed.” The seminar or conference is a very effective way to disseminate information. You can learn about the latest dentistry techniques or computer programming that way. You can learn about advertising or politics. You can learn all kinds of things *about* the Bible and even about God that way. You can fill out the blanks in prewritten lessons and get them all “right.”

Do these events succeed at actually drawing people to God, making them want to get to know Jesus, follow Him, become like Him, spread the good news about Him? When they do, it’s because of another factor—the personal factor. Why did John and Jane Doe attend this seminar to begin with? Their friend asked them, went with them, encouraged them. Their friend was *already* their friend.



It's certainly possible for a person to tune in to a television presentation or satellite series, listen all alone at home, get out her Bible to check what the speaker is saying, order the lessons if any, do them, and choose to become a Christian. It happens. The Holy Spirit works everywhere, all the time. But even this person is going to have to have friends now. She's going to have to find a church or group to join who will help her along the way, because God created us in community and it will be a rare person who enters heaven without it, if such a thing is possible at all.

So we have a thing we've come to call "friendship evangelism," a ministry that is entirely informal, unstructured and occurs when we least expect it.

Friendship Evangelism

By the proliferation of books and studies and seminars about this subject, one would think it had just been invented, somewhere around the beginning of the digital age. But let's look again at Pentecost, in Acts 2. The Bible says the people heard "them" speaking in their own languages. That would be everyone in the Upper Room, apparently about 120 people. See Acts 1:15. There is only one sermon recorded—Peter's public one. But there was clearly a lot more than that going on if 3,000 people joined. To whose houses did they go and break bread? How could they have had all things in common? They may all have been united, but to each individual's perception, they had to have felt united with few enough people to circle around, to share hugs with, to know and feel known.

The biggest Evangelistic Event we can imagine is made up of single individuals who are mostly there "with someone." Not only that, there is a long continuum of human experience and knowledge of God. At what we might designate the extreme left end of the continuum, there is the person who doesn't believe there is a God at all, or simply never thinks about it. At the extreme right are the people who are the most aware, moment by moment, of living and moving and having their being in God. These are usually humble souls, startled when others call them godly, or great Christians. It seems that the closer you get to that end of the spectrum, the more aware of God you are and the less aware of yourself, though, paradoxically, these people do *know* themselves with detailed and scrupulous honesty. (Which is probably why they're not proud ...)

Somewhere in the middle of this line is the cross of Christ, and the further to the left one goes from that line, the less and less likely it is that anyone living on that end of things will even consider attending an organized evangelism event. When it happens, it will be because of a human connection. His grandmother used to go to these and he's curious. His boss, a very interesting person because he has the unusual ability to be angry without harming the people around him, is a member of the originating church. Or maybe a friend is playing the violin there tonight.

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The overwhelming majority of the time, these events are targeted toward and appeal to the person who perhaps has a spiritual background, vaguely thinks the Bible is God's word, or is already a committed Christian who wants to know more about prophecy or lifestyle or which day is really the Sabbath of God.

For our friends who are already not too far left of the cross, or live in its light but are curious about our ability to put together the whole Bible into a cohesive and understandable whole, all we need to do is pray, remind ourselves to follow the principles outlined in Scripture, some of which have been delineated in this unit, pray, ask forgiveness when necessary, pray, and Be Friends! Go bowling together. Garden together. Share recipes and tools and a ride to the store. Pray together if they're interested. Show up when they're sick or frightened or lonely. Listen.

Listen! That requires ears, not mouth. Don't judge, keep praying, and listen.

If we are seeking a way to connect this person to an organized event we know is coming up, we can look for a connection that already exists. John loves classical music, has a season ticket to the symphony, and plays the cello, or wishes he did. Dave's church is putting on a music festival that portrays a key Bible truth in song. Bingo! Better yet, because Dave has a lot of friends like John, he is the one who suggested it to his church board. Maybe even helped to plan it; invited John to play "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring."

Friendship comes first. That's the principle. We are all naturally drawn to certain people, whether those who have things in common with us, or those who are different enough that we are attracted and curious.

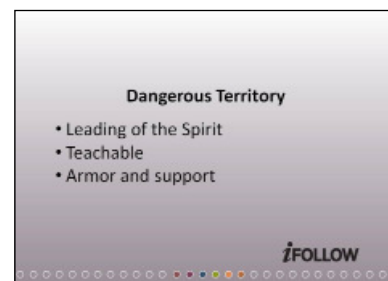
We like art, and so does the next-door neighbor. We invite him to attend a painting class with us. Or we take one from him.

We're from Missouri or Saskatchewan, and the new neighbor wears a hijab. We are cautious and respectful, but we get to know and love this woman, and maybe someday we can also learn what it means to her to be Muslim. And share what we have in common—and what we don't.

We are two guys in the same neighborhood who both love to rebuild old cars. Under the hood together, we can learn a lot about each others' souls.

When these friendships are strong and established, which will take time, sometimes lots of it, we start wondering what, if anything, we are to say about our faith. Should we try to deliberately turn conversations? Ask God, but don't assume it's true. It might not be, despite what successes the other people in Sabbath school class are having.

One likely scenario is that a day comes that one of us is in crisis. It hardly matters



which one. This is a loving friendship now, and the other will offer strength and comfort. Spiritual things will come up. And we may find we learn as much as we teach, but we *will* also get the chance to talk about trusting a God who loves us personally.

Dangerous Territory

What about those who are spiritual, but who have chosen a radically different path from ours? People like Wiccans, Buddhists, and Neo-Pagans (at least in western countries) tend to believe Jesus was a good man, or even a man who had a special connection with God (or whatever creative force they subscribe to), but certainly was in no way God Himself. Is it even safe to be close friends with these people?

Perhaps a good question to ask in return is, If they have no close Christian friends, how will they learn the truth about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection to provide abundant grace and forgiveness? Mind you, these things will have to be couched in significantly different terms than we are used to, even to *begin* to make sense to them. And as always, it all depends on the Spirit's call and leading.

There are Christians who can tell you these largely gentle, insightful people have a lot to teach us. And the truth is, there's not much point in attempting to witness to anyone you don't feel you could learn from. Because if the sharing doesn't go both ways, it's not true, godly sharing.

Therefore the answer to the question of safe friendship might be No. For some Christians, especially those who are new to faith, or who are not able to listen with an open mind without letting it be "so open your brain falls out," as the joke has it, close friendship with people whose beliefs are radically different but sometimes dangerously appealing may be a threat to their own faith. It comes back to letting the Holy Spirit lead. And that means we will be led in different directions, toward different people, and must not criticize each other. Even when we see someone join a pottery class that is largely New Agers of one sort or another. What we *will* do is offer strong support and prayer to that Christian who has been called to the front lines of duty.

The Christian who knows the Holy Spirit is calling her to this dangerous territory, where she may be privileged to "snatch [some] out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear," (Jude 23) will lean heavily on the next verse, about the One who is able to keep her from stumbling. She will be certain to get all her armor (Eph. 6:10-20) firmly fastened every day. But she will also remember she's still in community, and she needs her Christian friends as much or more than her New Age friends need her. They will be her anchor. They will not judge or accuse, but they will ask searching questions and help keep her honest and humble.

And she will remember, God's goal is the complete salvation of every soul He can rescue. But her own goal may only be to get her friends to move one inch to the right

on the continuum. It may be someone else's job to move them the next inch, and the next, until somewhere down the line, they come to the cross and have to make a decision. When they stand at that point, looking up at the Savior dying for them, will they have memories of Christians who died daily for them, too, who loved and accepted them where they were? Will there be enough of these memories to counteract the memories they almost certainly have of Christians who dwelt on judgment and condemnation, who concentrated too hard on the blood and gore that they obscured mercy, who made it *harder* for a modern person to accept this story rather than dismissing it with contempt?

Hardest of all is the person who is outright hostile to God and any mention of Him. It might be helpful to remember that people aren't born this way. If someone is angry about the whole idea of God, where is he on the spectrum? All the way to the left? Or could he be standing at the cross right now, and fighting it, because the Holy "Hound of heaven" has him in His sights? Is he reacting to ungodly "Christian" parents who beat him in the name of God? We need to realize clearly that a person who has the courage to turn away from God when given an evil picture of Him has done the right thing! This person is closer to the truth now than if he had accepted that image of a harsh, angry God and passed it on.

Are we able to love this person, prickles and all, and respect his right not to talk about religion or God or the Bible ever? Because we may be his very last chance to learn about truly unconditional love.

A preacher once said that we are all just blind lepers telling other blind lepers where the bread may be found. (2 Kings 7:3-11) If we could keep that in mind and remain humble and teachable, if we could remember to love God and love others, we will share our faith in new and more effective ways, and we, like the disciples, will be continually filled with joy. They will come—not to us, but to Jesus.

Handouts in this Package

1. Seven Key Texts
2. Are Your Attitudes Fruitful or Nutty?
3. Friendship Evangelism Principles



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Additional Resources

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Wright, N.T. (1994). *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Zackrisson, James (1993). *Power to Witness*. Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association.

Video/DVD

Friend 2 Friend curriculum for teaching Friendship Evangelism; includes six lectures on DVD by Monte Sahlin, Instructor's Guide, PowerPoint Slides, promotional video on DVD and textbook for participants. Published by the Center for Creative Ministry and available from AdventSource, www.adventsource.org or (800) 523-0525.

Fulfilling the Gospel Commission training kit includes nine lectures by Mark Finley on VHS video and a workbook. Published by HART Resource Center and available from AdventSource.

Making Friends for God Workbook training package includes five lectures by Mark Finley on VHS video, an Instructors's Guide and participant workbook. Published by HART Resource Center and available from AdventSource.

Winning Ways to Witness is a new seminar series by David Hartman, four sessions that help members identify their personal style and find an approach to witnessing that best fits them. This is published by the presenter and information on it is available at: davidhartman@bellsouth.net

Websites

Renovare is a Christian parachurch organization focused entirely on the development of a disciplined spiritual life: www.renovare.org/

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Discussion Questions

1. How many definitions of and synonyms for “witness” can the group think of? Which are closest to the Bible definition? What do you think of our tendency to make it an action verb, “witnessing”?
2. Have you experienced a person trying to witness to you? Did you like it? Why not?
3. What is an important instance of someone sharing their faith with you in a positive way?
4. Do you find yourself being more pushy or nagging than you want to be, because of fear for the person? What can you do about it?
5. Who are the people you are most concerned with reaching for Christ? What are some of the ways you try to reach them? Do these methods clearly show the fruit of the Spirit, **from their point of view?**

Group Activities

Activity 1

Purpose: To dig out new insights from the story of Paul's dramatic meeting with Jesus on the Damascus Road.

Preparation: If the group is larger than eight or 10, divide into smaller discussion groups. Writing materials would be helpful. If you have a couple of people who would like to make a skit of the conversion experience—very simple, just as it is told, that would be a big bonus.

Assignment: If you decided to have a skit, do that first. Otherwise, read the two tellings of the story in Acts 9:1-8 and 26:12-18. Then have the group(s) determine as many facets as they can of this visitation, and discuss what bearing, if any, they have on our witness today. You may use these questions if desired. A scribe may keep a record of group insights and ideas if desired.

1. Jesus says to get up. Yet He is the one who knocked Saul down. Are there times in your life when you have felt this way? How did God “knock you down” or catch your attention? Why was He reduced to desperate measures? How did He stand you up again?
2. Jesus says He is appointing Saul a minister and witness to things he's already seen and to things he will see later. Is our witness constantly fresh and new? Are we seeing new visions, learning new things? Or is it always the same story? In what ways **should** it be the same story, Jesus Christ and Him crucified? In what ways should it be new and refreshed?
3. Jesus says He is rescuing Saul from the Jews and the Gentiles. How might Saul have reacted at first to this? Weren't they the ones who needed to be rescued from him? Why would he need to be rescued from them? Do we need rescuing from those to whom we speak, or do they need rescuing from us?
4. What does Jesus say He is sending Saul to do and why? Have you seen your witness accomplish these things? Can you see any new reasons why or why not?
5. Notice that the burden of the message, as always, is forgiveness and new life. In what ways is this the burden of our witness?

Time: If there is a skit, it shouldn't take more than 10 minutes. Allow a few minutes for reading, and then 20 minutes for discussion. If the group has divided, they may join for some sharing of insights for another 10 minutes.

Activity 2

Purpose: To share some ways in which witnessing has been helpful or unhelpful in the lives of participants and try to come up with some useful principles.

Preparation: This activity will work well in the whole group if it is less than 15-20 people; otherwise, divide, in which case you will need space for one or more groups. Each group will need a flipchart or board and markers; also individual writing materials. If the group is larger, you may wish to ask a few in advance to prepare to share their stories, with an eye to some who were converted by “traditional” methods, and some otherwise.

Assignment: Have three to six members of the group briefly tell the skeleton version of their conversion stories. Did they come from not knowing God to knowing Him? How? Did they grow up knowing God? What are some of the ways He has led and taught them? Take note together of how often the stories include positive, enjoyable learning experiences, and how often they include some kind of “learning the hard way.” Discuss the differences briefly. Then see if the group(s) can come up with practical suggestions for witnessing that worked (that is, which made the person feel loved by God and by the witness) and record them on the board. It would be good, if practical, to create partners who will meet together and pray for each other’s witness for a period of six to eight weeks. The group could meet again at the end of this time to compare notes.

Time: If necessary, allow a few minutes for dividing. Have each person talk no longer than three or four minutes. Be sure this is understood ahead of time. Allow 20 minutes for discussion and noting effective methods. Then give five minutes for choosing a partner and for those partners to pray together, committing each other to the work God has called them to do.

Seven Key Texts on Christian Witness

Make notes on what each text tells you about witnessing.

1. Luke 24:48

2. John 15:26, 27

3. Acts 1:22

4. Acts 4:33

5. Acts 22:15

6. Acts 23:11

7. Acts 26:16-18

Focus

If our methods, programs, plans, seminars and courses are to introduce people to Jesus, they must be centered on proclaiming the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, changed lives, and the abundant grace of forgiveness. That's contagious.

One thoughtful definition of witnessing calls it "offering Christ to those outside our doors." Just offering. That's all. Jesus died for your freedom, and mine, to believe or not. We violate that freedom when we try to insist and convince. God loves that person even more than we can, and He has a thousand ways. All He wants is for us to tell our stories.

Handout 2

Are Your Attitudes Fruitful or Nutty?

The quintessential description of the perfect Christian attitude is in Galatians 5:22-23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” How does this attitude come through in your witness?

Joy: Acts 13:52

Peace: Psalm 85:10

Patience: Revelation 14:12

Kindness: 2 Peter 1:7-8

Goodness: Ephesians 5:9

Faithfulness: Hebrews 10:23, Isaiah 54:13

Gentleness: Titus 3:2

Self-Control: Psalm 141:3

“Preach the gospel at all times. When necessary, use words.” Francis of Assisi.

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Handout 3

Friendship Evangelism Principles

1. Listen.
2. Find common interests.
3. Watch for the leading of the Spirit.
4. Maintain a teachable attitude; assume you have as much to learn from others as they have from you.
5. If you're in crisis, accept their comfort and help. Let them see both your pain and fear, and your trust that God knows what He is doing. Be sure you make it clear that you do not believe God caused bad to happen, though. If they are in crisis, be there to offer support and comfort. Listen. Ask what you can do. Offer to pray. You will know by now whether it is appropriate to offer to pray aloud with them. If it isn't, don't push it.
6. If you have friends who are of radically different belief systems, you are blessed. God is sending you to the front lines.
7. Be sure your Christian support system is strong and in place.
8. Be humble and pay attention to their questions and admonitions.
9. Do not neglect your personal devotional life.
10. Don't try to move someone all the way from the left to the right. That's God's job, and will happen in His time.

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