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Witnessing in the New Testament

Lesson Aim

Discover New Testament secrets for witnessing that we can incorporate into our lives, beginning this week.

A. Reading and thinking about New Testament witnessing encounters

The three accounts to read and discuss are:

- ▶ John 4:1-42: Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well
- ▶ Acts 8:26-40: Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch
- ▶ Acts 16:16-34: Paul's encounter at Mars' Hill.

Spend some time discussing students' observations about the three accounts. You may have to limit your discussion to one or two accounts so there will be time to discuss the points in Section B. (Or, you may want to integrate the Section B points into this discussion.)

B. Learning from the witnessing accounts

Briefly discuss students' thoughts, adding these into your discussion:

John 4:1-42 † *Jesus' Encounter With the Woman at the Well*

1. Be alert and available. God loves to use tired, hungry, thirsty, despised, weak people. He presents ordinary situations, needs, and interruptions as opportunities for witness. There is no perfect opportunity. Use what He gives you and He will give you more (vv. 6, 7).
2. Ask unbelievers, even strangers, for help (v. 7). "If you are shy, learn to say 'Hi!'"
3. Don't be put off by external appearances and differences (vv. 6-9).
4. Create curiosity (vv. 7-9).
5. Find ways to move to spiritual matters (v. 10).
6. Choose your controversies carefully (v. 12). Be respectful of people's backgrounds and ideas. For example, the "Son of God" controversy with Muslims. On the other hand, if someone asks you, "Do you think all who don't accept Jesus will go to Hell?" you can say, "Here, read this (John 14:6) and tell me what you think Jesus meant by it."
7. Don't give away your answers too quickly or easily (v. 14).
8. Try to involve family and friends when possible (v. 16).
9. Aim for the person's conscience (vv. 17, 18).
10. Be alert for rabbit trails. Return to the main issues (vv. 19, 20).

11. Don't be afraid to tell the truth (vv. 21, 22). With a smile and respect, you can say almost anything!
12. Point people to an encounter with God (vv. 23, 24).
13. Point people to Jesus. Make much of Him (vv. 25, 26).
14. Spirit-directed encounters nourish us (vv. 32-34).
15. Look for and expect opportunities all around (vv. 35-38).
16. Be flexible and available when there is interest (vv. 40-42).

Acts 8:26-40 † *Philip's Encounter With the Ethiopian Eunuch*

1. Listen to and obey the Holy Spirit (vv. 26-29).
2. Do not be distracted by circumstances and appearances (vv. 26, 27).
3. Listen and ask questions (v. 30).
4. Get close to people (vv. 29-31).
5. Discover the person's interests (vv. 30, 32, 33, 35).
6. Use the Bible when appropriate (v. 35). You don't always need to mention chapter and verse.
7. Point to Jesus Christ (v. 35).
8. Work toward a decision (vv. 36-38). Give the person an opportunity for some kind of response.
9. Seek God's guidance about ongoing contact and follow-up (v. 39).

Acts 17:16-34 † *Paul's Encounter on Mars' Hill*

1. Be proactive (vv. 17, 22). Paul took the initiative. He didn't wait till they asked. He went to them where they gathered.
2. Be respectful and affirming of what is good (v. 22).
3. Be observant (v. 23). Cultivate a healthy, thoughtful curiosity. Ask questions; use object lessons and stories. Look for evidences of God at work in the person or his culture. We may assume all people are worshipers at heart, though they may not know God and may grossly misunderstand Him.
4. Go from the known to the unknown (v. 23). Paul began with local beliefs and practices.
5. Be confident (v. 23), but be humble.
6. Begin with Creation with those who have no background in Scriptures (v. 24).
7. Share with humility and equality (v. 26), not cultural superiority. Remember, what people are doing makes perfect, logical sense to them.
8. Be alert to people God places in your life so that you can help them find Him (vv. 26, 27). For example, in a game of blindman's bluff, the players seem far away but yet may be very close to the "blind man."
9. Remember the closeness of God (v. 27). God is near. Communicate a message of hope.
10. Look for and expect to find bridges from the local culture. Become acquainted with the sayings and literature of the people (v. 28). People love when we use their proverbs.
11. Aim for both the mind and the conscience (vv. 29, 30). Appeal to the person's sense of right and wrong and how well he has lived up to his own conscience. Confront error creatively and courageously, but graciously. Give the benefit of the doubt when possible ("this ignorance").
12. Call to repentance (vv. 30, 31).
13. Remind them of the coming judgment (v. 31). We all have a sense of fairness; we desire punishment of the wicked and protest when the wicked are rewarded.

14. Keep the focus on Christ. Point to His resurrection as proof of the judgment to come (v. 31). He claimed to be the Judge; He claimed He would rise from the dead. He actually did so. Therefore . . .
15. Be willing to experience mockery and opposition (v. 32). But remain sweet. Even if they won't read your Bible, they will read you and your reactions. Endure negative reactions without giving up.
16. Be patient; it's a process. Rejoice in small signs of progress (v. 32).
17. Gather new believers into groups for discipleship and outreach (v. 34). Redirect your primary focus to those who show interest.
18. Be willing to start small (v. 34). Mighty oaks from little acorns grow.

Conclusion of Today's Lesson

- Review assignments for the next session and give direction as needed.
- Tell students that the best way to learn to witness is to do it, and one assignment each week will be for them to witness to at least one unsaved person.
- Help students find a way to implement the prayer suggestion. Perhaps students could either meet together or pray together by phone at another time during the week.

Dealing With Fear and Weakness; Motives for Witnessing

Lesson Aims

Acknowledge fears of witnessing and find ways to overcome them.

Review motives for witnessing and choose those that will best contribute to and sustain a lifestyle of witnessing.

Begin today's session by asking one or two students to briefly share something they learned from a witnessing encounter in the past week. The opening prayer could then include praying by name for one or more of the persons who were witnessed to. Note: The word *briefly* is crucial here. The sharing can easily consume a lot of time if participants go into extensive details. Remind students to give a brief summary of the lesson they learned and be careful not to share negative details about those to whom they witnessed.

Another valuable part of this sharing time is to give students opportunity to share problems they encountered in witnessing and discuss how to handle similar situations. Again, do not take too much time from the class period.

Dealing With Fear and Weakness

Discuss this question from the student's lesson introduction: What are some of the fears that hinder us from being the witness Christ wants us to be?

Failure, rejection, mockery, hard questions, mistreatment . . .

A. Paul's emotions when witnessing (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

1. What did Paul feel when he witnessed to the Corinthians? Why?
Weakness, fear, much trembling. Perhaps partly because of the suffering he had experienced as he preached. He also recognized his own weakness and knew that if he depended on himself in any way, his efforts would be fruitless.
2. In what way did his emotions turn out to be his allies in witnessing?
He learned to depend not on enticing words of wisdom but on the demonstration of the Spirit and the power of God. The converts' faith rested in the power of God, not in the wisdom of men.

B. How can difficulties in witnessing result in blessing?

1. Luke 6:22, 23
Suffering for Christ increases our reward in Heaven.
2. 1 Peter 4:12-14
Suffering increases our joy when Christ is glorified and results in the Spirit of God resting upon us in larger measure.

3. 2 Corinthians 12:9, 10

Suffering results in Christ's power resting upon us, and in our being perfected in weakness; when we are weak, then we are strong.

4. 2 Timothy 2:12

Suffering prepares us to reign with Christ. No pain, no gain; no cross, no crown; no thorns, no throne.

C. How can we grow in boldness as witnesses for Christ?

1. Review the worst possible thing that could happen to us, and tell why it would not be so bad after all!

Death—immediate entrance into the presence of Christ and a martyr's reward!

2. Reflect on three possible responses to our witness and how they represent a “win” rather than a “loss.”

We normally think *if they accept my witness = a win; if they listen but delay accepting my witness = a loss; if they reject my witness = a loss*. However, from a different point of view, each response is actually a “win.” Discuss how all three responses can be a winning situation for the witness.

Listen but delay: A seed is planted that may germinate in the future. Reject: Increased my reward; provides an opportunity for the person to observe a godly reaction under pressure.

3. Discover what true success is in witnessing:

“Success in witnessing is . . . taking the initiative to share the Gospel in the power of the Spirit and leaving (or trusting) the results with God” (Bill Bright).

How can this definition help us in witnessing?

Our responsibility is to witness; only God can convict and convert people. Every encounter done in love for God and people will accomplish something useful in God's economy; He wastes nothing.

4. Follow the example of the early Christians. What did they do when they suffered for witnessing? What did they ask God to do? (Acts 4:20, 21, 23-31, especially verses 24, 29-31).

They respectfully refused to stop witnessing; they prayed; they reviewed God's greatness and Scripture. They asked God for boldness to witness and for confirming signs and wonders. Note the absence of a request for safety.

5. Learn an answer that you can use for every hard question you may encounter:

Smile. Then say, “That is a good question. I am not completely sure of the answer. If you give me a week or two, I will research it for you. May I have your telephone number/e-mail address so I can get back to you with the answer?”

6. What are the advantages of a response like this to hard questions?

What resources would you access to find answers?

Takes off the pressure to know everything; honesty; a reason for further contact at a point of interest. One resource is Tough Questions Skeptics Ask, by McDowell/Stewart.

Motives for Witnessing

Discuss with students why they think these are bad, good, or better motives.