

## Session 6: Witnessing

In this session we learn about witnessing. We're going to answer four questions about witnessing. First, after some general remarks, we tackle the question of what is witnessing? Then we address the questions of who is a witness? Is it only the individual or does the community of faith also play a role? Third, we want to answer the question of what is the gospel? What do we witness to? The fourth question: What nurtures our witness? Last: Is there a biblical approach to witnessing and what is that approach?

I tell you this story only by way of illustration at how I have come to approach the discipline of witnessing.

### 1. What is witnessing?

**Definition:** Witnessing is promoting the gospel of Jesus Christ with more than our lips. The key point I want to start with is this: **WE ARE THE WITNESSES. WITNESSING CANNOT BE DIVORCED FROM THE WHO WE ARE, WHAT CHARACTER IS LIKE. WE ARE THE CARRIERS OF THE GOSPEL. WE ARE THE GOSPEL MOST PEOPLE READ AND HEAR. WHAT WE WITNESS TO CANNOT BE DIVORCED FROM WHO WE ARE. WHAT WE DO AFFECTS OUR WITNESS.**

Here's the second point I want to make. Witnessing, like any of the other disciplines, does not earn us anything. We called the disciplines the means of grace. And grace is what God's favor is and also what God enables us to do because we don't have the strength to do it on our own. In my flesh, I don't want to fast, or witness for fear of rejection, or serve. I'm too selfish. So it takes much effort to do the disciplines. Witnessing like its sister disciplines is work. It's deliberate work. It's work we can't do in our own strength. The Holy Spirit must be all over it. It must be bathed in much prayer and grace. It takes some effort.

Some people are opposed to any effort in the Christian life claiming that grace precludes works. They hold to such archaic notions that the Old Testament was all about the law and works but the New Testament is all about grace. They quote verses like Ephesians 2:8-9, "for by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that on one may boast." See, some say, you can't do works because works is contrary to grace in the life of salvation. They stop too soon because verse 10 continues Paul's thought: "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." We cannot divorce good works from Christianity. According to James, those who do have a dead faith. I don't know about you, but I don't need a dead faith. We should walk in good works. To walk is to live and all our lives ought to be full of good works.

There are Christians that are paralyzed by this. They won't do anything for fear of works. The mistake is to oppose grace and works. Grace is not opposed to working but to earning: "lest anyone should boast." **Earning is an attitude** that says if I do such and such, if I pray, if I fast, if I witness, then God is obligated to return the favor

by blessing me. This is the danger of the disciplines of the Christian life as a whole and we must avoid it at all cost.

I began with saying that witnessing is promoting the gospel with more than our lips. It includes activities such as prayer for the spread of the gospel, supporting the work of the gospel with our money, doing good works, right living or right conduct, justifying our hopefulness, and telling the story of the gospel convincingly.

## **2. Who then is a witness?**

**A. Every one is a witness. The question should really be who is a good witness?**

**The answer is: Every follower of Jesus:** A witness is one who finds Jesus and invites others to come to Jesus. In that sense, then, every follower of Jesus must engage in the activity of witnessing. But witnessing is not simply a solo flight. It's not something we do by ourselves as if we are unattached to others.

Witnesses are individuals who share their communities' stories of hope and invite others to Jesus.

John the Baptist was the first witness to Jesus after the Holy Spirit in John 1:15 and 29-34. Basically John tells what he knows about the Messiah based on the Holy Spirit's guidance and the hope of his Jewish community of faith.

Jesus is also a witness to the Father. He tells us by word, sign, actions, behavior, teaching, and prayer what God is like. He speaks the truth concerning God and his relationship to God.

The Holy Spirit is the ultimate witness to Jesus. He teaches, shows, and tells us who Jesus is, and how to live and be like him.

In John 1:35 Andrew leaves his apprenticeship or discipleship to John the Baptist to follow Jesus. He spends part of a day with Jesus. Then he goes and finds Simon Peter and tells him: We have found the Messiah. Then he invites him to come and see.

John 1:43 Philip follows Jesus after Andrew and Peter. Then he finds Nathanael and says to him after some questioning: We have found the Messiah. Then he too invites him to come and see.

Witnessing is the common activity of those who find Jesus. Really, it is all those who are found by Jesus.

## **B. The church corporately is also a witness.**

But witnesses are not only individuals. The whole church is also a witness.

### **How then does the church witness?**

If we only promote the gospel with our lips, we would be missing out on a number of biblical ways available to the church to be a witness. We can and must promote

the gospel with our lips and with more than our lips. This is biblical. I'm borrowing the term and ideas of promoting the gospel or witnessing from John Dickson's book *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*.

- 1) The church promotes the gospel by praying. In Matthew 9:35-38 Jesus says that the harvest is plentiful but workers are few. What's the problem? Few workers for the harvest. What's the solution? Just send a few more helpers.

But that's not what Jesus recommends. He recommends prayer. He says: "Ask the Lord of the harvest, to send workers". What Jesus does here, for the very first time ever, is to involve his disciples in his mission of preaching and healing. He invites their prayerful participation in the work of God.

In Ephesians 6:19-20 Paul asks for prayer so that he might know what words to use and to be fearless or courageous in sharing them. He needed the help of prayer to do the work of the Gospel. The church intercedes for others to receive the kingdom when we pray for others to be able to speak fearlessly the Gospel and those who might receive it.

So when you get together if your group or your church and you intentionally pray for the lost among you, your friends, your city officials, you are participating in promoting the gospel or witnessing. When you pray for those who are courageously proclaiming the gospel you are partnering with God as he expands his kingdom.

- 2) The church also promotes the gospel by giving. In 1 Corinthians 9:14 Paul affirms the Lord's commandment "that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel." In Philippians 1:3-5 Paul says that there is a partnership in the Gospel and a partnership into or for the sake of the gospel. We participate in the work of evangelism by supporting others who are doing the work of evangelism in all kinds of ways.

So if your group decides to support missionaries are you not participating in the work of the gospel?

- 3) The church also promotes the Gospel by its works. Jesus told us that you (plural) are to let your (plural) light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify God. You, all of you together, are to be salt and light in your community (Matthew 5:14-16). This shining is done to attract attention to God, not to ourselves, or our churches. The church is a "world-saving-light" when it shines with its acts of kindness or goodness. It's a healing salt bath for the weary and sin burdened souls. When plagues infested the Roman Empire, it was the Christians who remained, risked being infected with diseases, put their lives on the line, and some even died in order to promote the Gospel. "Good deeds", says John Dickson, "must never be thought of as a missionary tactic, a means of getting people onside before

hitting them with the gospel... They are the essential fruit of the gospel.” Because the true gospel always produces fruit, the deeds of Christians are a powerful witness to the gospel.

So when your church adopts a school, does ESL for immigrants, or ministers to a neglected sector in your community, is it not promoting the gospel?

- 4) Not only all this but also we advance the cause of the gospel through our conduct. Paul says to Titus: “In every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive” (2:10). Peter tells us to live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God (1 Peter 2:12). What does Peter give for example of the power of godly behavior? “Wives in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives (1 Peter 3:1-2). Good conduct can be a cause for the birth of faith in others just as much as hearing words can be a cause of faith as Peter says in 3:15 “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. St Francis is reported as saying: Preach the gospel with your life and if necessary use words.”
- 5) Another aspect of promoting the gospel is the praise of the church. In 1 Peter 2:9, Peter says “we declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.” When the church gathers to adore God in worship and praise and thanks for all his works in the earth, those on the sidelines are affected by this promotion and enter into the fellowship.

People come to God for two reasons. One they come out of a sense of need they are helpless to do anything about. Two, they come when they are drawn by a sense of awe and reverence. When the church learns to be awed at God, and meet real needs that people have, it is promoting the gospel.

- 6) Last, we are together to promote the gospel by preparing ourselves to give the right answer when people ask us why do we live in hope (1 Peter 3:15).

### **3. What is the message? Or what is the Gospel we tell?**

In bullet form the gospel according to many passages (1 Corinthians 15:3-5) is this:

- a. Jesus is the Messiah (Messiah is an anointed king. A king has a kingdom) As the Messiah king his business is to establish God’s kingdom and will on earth as it is in heaven. The main thing we witness to is that this kingdom is available to us in Jesus. We have changed our mind about him, about ourselves, about our wrong way of life. By faith we accept the way and life of the kingdom. We see and enter the kingdom through him. We live in a trust relationship with him. We obey his teachings. We hope in him.

- b. Jesus died to save—the salvation Jesus offers is through his death and life (Romans 5:9-10).
- c. Jesus was buried
- d. Jesus was raised from the dead and his resurrection life saves us too.
- e. Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.
- f. Jesus went up to heaven where he sits in victory at the right hand of his Father's throne. He sits because his work is complete. He's on the throne because he is victorious over death and sin.
- g. Jesus will come back once his kingdom plans are completed.

2 Timothy 2:8-9 is probably the briefest expression of the gospel. "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal."

At every turn, Jesus is connected to kingdom. During the 40 days after Jesus rose from the dead he taught his disciples about the kingdom. 40 days of straight teaching on the gospel of the kingdom. (Acts 1:3).

In Acts 28:30-31 the last 2 verses Luke wants us to know in summary fashion the heart of Paul's work: Proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

So we have every reason to believe that witnessing according to Jesus and Paul and frankly the rest of the Bible is about God, his kingdom of love and life, and participating in his reign and will.

#### **4. What nurtures our witness?**

I have found that as my hopes go so goes my faith and love and the witness that springs from them. We must live in hope. Hope is such an important factor in witnessing that we will be poorer if we don't explore it a bit. I have noticed in my own life and those I train to witness, and those who witness that as hope goes in their lives so goes witnessing. Could it be true that our witness is dependent on the hope that burns within us? I believe so.

James Bryan Smith in his book, *The Good and Beautiful Community*, explains that hope is the fountain from which we live our lives in the kingdom of God. In Colossians 1:5 Paul says "the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for us in heaven."

Hope by definition is "confidence in the a good future." The story of Christ's life and death, resurrection, ascension, and return must be grafted deeply onto our life story.

- 1) Paul says in Colossians 3:3 that the power source of our witness is rooted in the death of Jesus Christ. The songwriter captured it perfectly: My sin O the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin not in part but the whole, is nailed to the

cross and I bear it no more, praise the Lord O my soul! Witnessing is rooted in our hope that our death with Christ is the power source of our life. He died and I died with him.

- 2) Jesus was also raised from the dead and we were raised with him as Paul says in Colossians 2:12. We participate in the resurrection life of Jesus now. We were saved by his death and now we are being saved by his resurrection life (Romans 5:9-10). The song of the hymn says it best: I serve a risen savior, he's in the world today, I know that he is living no matter what men may say. I see his hand of mercy; I hear his voice of cheer. And just the time I need him he's always near. He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today. He walks and talks with me along life's narrow way. He lives, He lives, salvation to impart. You ask me how I know he lives, he lives within my heart". There's a new me because Jesus is alive (2 Cor. 5:17). Paul says in Colossians 3:10 that I have a new self in Jesus that is constantly being renewed in hope. Witnessing is located here in the renewal work of God in our lives. We receive this hope that we desire to share.
- 3) Colossians 3:1 asks us to set our hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand on the throne of God. He is seated because his work is complete. He is on the throne because he won the victory over death, and sin, the world and all the wrongs it inflicts. Because of his victory, I am also on the winning side. Whatever oppresses me is subject to Christ. He has defeated all that could defeat me as I sit enthroned with him in the heavenly places.
- 4) We live in the hope that Jesus will be back as Paul in Colossians 3:4 says. All that this broken world knows will be made whole. Sickness will be gone. Justice will be easy as easy as water rolling down the hill. All wrong will be made right.

##### **5. How then do we prepare ourselves and what approach do we use to witness to Jesus?**

Henry Blackaby tells a story of trying to reach the university campus in Saskatoon. After one year of trying there was no fruit. At the end of the year, fueled by failure and dissatisfaction, Henry gathers a few students and challenges them to go back to their campus and to do it the way Jesus would do it. Basically, the challenge was: find the person that God is working in, and give yourself to the task of witnessing and making a disciple of that person.

How do you do that? The students asked. Henry shared with them Romans 3:10-11 and John 6:44. Basically, these two seasoned followers of Christ say that everyone is lost and is without hope and that no one comes unless God draws him. "When you see someone seeking God or asking about spiritual matters, you are seeing God at work." Great things followed. And the rest of the story is it not written in the book of Claude King and Henry Blackaby in *Experiencing God*?

I have followed this approach and it has done me well. Let me tell you about Doug, not his real name. I met Doug in restaurant where I hang out regularly when I want some time alone but also to be available to the Holy Spirit's service. I'd gone to this place for a few months and struck up a friendship with Doug when there was a lull. We talked about family, life, broken dreams. I shared mine as well. Told him about some of the missed opportunities of my life and some of my struggles at the time. Our conversation began to deepen. One day, I said to Doug, I've known you for a while now, but I've not invited you to church. We're having a Christmas Eve service, consider this your official invitation. I knew I was taking a risk. Doug accepted my invitation. He came and the church promoted the gospel beautifully that night. Our relationship continued. I bought Doug a study Bible and asked him to read and when he had any questions, I'd help him answer them. Week after week we would meet and I would answer his questions. Every once in a while I would ask him if he was ready to give his life to Christ. One time he said he was. We prayed together and I welcomed him into the kingdom of God. I continued to meet with Doug over the next couple of years, continued to answer his questions and I would ask him what the Holy Spirit is saying to him about baptism. This went on for a little while, until one day, he said he was ready to be baptized. He invited the whole family to witness his baptism and hear the church promote the gospel. Today, Doug has hit a bump in the road in his walk with Jesus and I'm still walking with him through this valley.

I could also tell you about my next-door neighbor or the guy who walks my neighbor's dog. But I won't.

Here's the approach that I believe is biblical. It is anchored in Luke 10:1-6 and reflects Henry's approach that worked in the University in Saskatoon. Read.

- 1) **The first step in this approach is to pray that God would lead you to a person of peace.** Someone who is prepared to hear the message of the kingdom of God, change their mind about the king and his kingdom and trust the king. Jesus first went about doing the work of the kingdom alone. Then he sends out the 12 disciples by twos to do it. In Luke 10:1-6 he sends out 72. Later he will send out all the ones gathered at Pentecost. Now all of us are to go and make disciples.

Finding a person of peace is the first part of the activity of witnessing. It's keeping our ears and hearts open to people in our everyday routine life that are prepared by God through others to hear the message of the king and his kingdom. You know you found a person of peace when he indicates that he is ready to hear you announce the gospel. Here, prayer is key. As we leave our homes daily we pray that God will lead us to a person of peace and give us words to speak. Keep your ears tuned to God. When the person of peace crosses your path, being in tune with God, you're ready to speak. Not speaking is an act of disobedience.

This was not only Jesus' way of outreach or witness it was Paul's too. With Lydia, with the Philippian jailor, and in other places, Paul found the open door and walked in it. It was always a person of peace. It was always a process, a journey of accompanying people into the kingdom of God.

Our approach is to live daily in hope and in knowing that it is in our job description as disciples to witness. Jesus was sent into the world on a rescue operation. And just as the father sent him he also sends us.

We must time our moving into the life of the person of peace.

We must understand that we are not the only ones that God may have placed in his life.

We must not waste precious time on those who are not ready to receive the message.

- We must stick to the task of witnessing.
- The person of peace is ready to receive you and your message. If he's not shake the dust off your feet and move on (Matthew 10:14).
- The person of peace is ready to lend an ear. If he does he's not only listening to you but also to Jesus (Luke 10:16).
- The person of peace will go out of his way to give you a hand in what you're doing (Matthew 10:10).

Expect rejection. Not everyone welcomed Jesus and not every one will welcome you. Shake the dust and go on. Shaking the dust is not condemning. It's not rejecting. It could be a change or shift in audience or a change in strategy.

What happens when a person is not ready? With those who are not ready, we must choose carefully how to witness. It doesn't mean we don't witness at all. We could do an act of kindness, we could conduct ourselves well in their presence, we could pray, we could do any number of things that could possibly help in their readiness to hear.

We must not consider everyone a person of peace. Many people cross our paths seldom. We don't get a chance to build relationships with them. We must invest in those who are around us long term.

2) **Step 2 is to watching.** In prayer we ask. In watching we look for the answer. All along we are asking God to give us eyes of compassion, feeling of sympathy, and actions of love and discernment. Just like Jesus. 40 times in the Gospels the pattern of Jesus entering people's world of hurt, and brokenness is to see, feel, and act. In Luke 7:11-17 this pattern is evident. In many other encounters of proclaiming the kingdom of God, Jesus sees, his heart goes out, and meets some need they have. We can't do much better than that.



- 3) **The third step in this approach is to reach out.** Do it without raising alarms, without fanfare. Practice hospitality. Do small acts of kindness. Give them a ride. Offer to babysit. Take a dozen cookies. Shovel their snow. Keep on the lookout at what you can do to be in their favor or to do them favors.
- 4) **The fourth step is to listen.** Listen well. Take time to listen. You can't shortcut listening. You can listen by any means you have. Text messages, email, phone calls. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you sensitive ears to hear what is said and what is behind what is said. Listen to where God is working in their lives, even though they don't know it. Do you sense a need? Are they overwhelmed by life? Have they had a sacred moment? A death, a birth, an accident, an illness. God may be shouting in their pain. Your witness is to help them hear what you're hearing and what they can't hear on their own.
- 5) **The fifth step is to connect.** Here is where hope now shines. Your hope is in the story of Christ and that story is your life. He is present with you as you are with him. He is reigning in this world and wants people to know and live in this reign. You've discovered the need it's time to connect the dots for them. Pray for discernment about how the gospel applies to the need or sacred moment. Say a death in the family has occurred. How does the gospel answer that need. Jesus defeated death. God is and promises to walk with us in the darkest of valleys. Ask the right questions here and you'll be connecting to the deepest need they have. Connect the gospel with the need you see. Smith suggests a couple of questions to ask: What is giving you hope right now? What keeps you going?
- 6) **Step six is to share.** Tell your story. Share your thoughts. I was asked to share my story with Doug. People want to know what happened to us? They ask for the reason of the hope we carry.  
At this point there are a couple of things that can take place. We become fearful of rejection, of misunderstanding, or not knowing enough. Let's settle this: We don't have all the answers. The Holy Spirit does. Rejection may happen, then we shake the dust from our feet. Misunderstanding happens, deal with it. We are not perfect and every body knows it. Smith is blunt: Get over it. Let go of your inhibitions. Be ready to share, Peter says. Tell them why hope guides your life (1 Peter 3:15-16). Tell them about your hope in Christ from Colossians. You died with Christ. You rose with Christ. You're seated with Christ. You're expecting Christ's return to be with him forever.
- 7) **Last step is invite them into your circle of friends and church.** They can belong before they believe. They can be a blessing to others before they believe and belong. Conversion may come sooner or later (18 months).