

Making Friends for God: The Joy of Sharing in His Mission

Winsome Witness: The Power of Personal Testimony

Lesson #2 for July 11, 2020

Scriptures: Mark 5:15-20; 16:1-11; Acts 4:1-20; 26:1-32; 1 John 1:1-3; Galatians 2:20.

1. Why is a personal testimony so powerful? If you are like Paul and feel that you cannot keep quiet about your relationship with Jesus Christ, it will be seen and heard.
2. No one can argue with you about your personal testimony or experience. They can argue about theology; they can scoff at religion; but, when you talk about your personal experience, even skeptics may be impacted by the power of the gospel and how it has affected you.
3. Occasionally, people have a sudden, dramatic conversion like the apostle Paul's on the Damascus road. But, much more common is the story of people who are gradually drawn in by the love of God, the preciousness of Jesus.
4. Some have an exciting, new relationship with God and Jesus Christ when they come into contact with someone who can explain the gospel in ways that make sense to modern thinkers or even serious inquirers about the Bible. Consider this biblical story!

Mark 5:15-20: ¹⁵And when they came to Jesus, they saw the man who used to have the mob of demons in him. He was sitting there, clothed and in his right mind; and they were all afraid. ¹⁶Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the man with the demons, and about the pigs.

¹⁷ So they asked Jesus to leave their territory.

¹⁸ As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had had the demons begged him, "Let me go with you!"

¹⁹ But Jesus would not let him. Instead, he told him, "**Go back home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how kind he has been to you.**"

²⁰ So the man left and went all through the Ten Towns, telling what Jesus had done for him. And all who heard it were amazed.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Mark 5:15–20). New York: American Bible Society.†

5. That is one incredible story. Jesus asked His disciples to get in the boat to travel across the Sea of Galilee to Gentile territory. Did the disciples ask among themselves, "Why are we doing this?" Almost immediately after they reached the other side, they were attacked by one or two demon-possessed individuals; the rest of the story is history. The region of Decapolis, mostly on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River, stretches from Damascus in the north to Palestinian Philadelphia in the South.
See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decapolis>
6. An interesting bit of trivia is that Pella, one of the cities of the Decapolis, is a few miles south of where this story took place. Pella was the city to which the Christians fled when Jerusalem was first surrounded by the Roman armies in A.D. 66.
7. How would you have responded if you had been one of those who heard the demoniac's testimony? He had been transformed from being demon-possessed, terrorizing the whole countryside to a man who was physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually whole.
8. Notice these words from Ellen White about personal witnesses.

As witnesses for Christ, we are to tell what we know, what we ourselves have seen and heard and felt. If we have been following Jesus step by step, we shall have something right to the point to tell concerning the way in which He has led us. We can tell how we have tested His promise, and found the promise true. We can bear witness to what we have known of the grace of Christ. This is the witness for which our Lord calls, and for want of which the world is perishing.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 340.1.†

9. This former demoniac (and Matthew 8:28-34 suggests he probably had a companion) was the first Gentile missionary! Would we have chosen him? There are two very important things to know about this story that few know. These two men had an enormous impact on that mostly Gentile area, as Ellen White explains:

Though the people of Gergesa had not received Jesus, He did not leave them to the darkness they had chosen. When they bade Him depart from them, they had not heard His words. **They were ignorant of that which they were rejecting. Therefore He again sent the light to them, and by those to whom they would not refuse to listen.**

In causing the destruction of the swine, it was Satan's purpose to turn the people away from the Saviour, and prevent the preaching of the gospel in that region. But this very occurrence roused the whole country as nothing else could have done, and directed attention to Christ. **Though the Saviour Himself departed, the men whom He had healed remained as witnesses to His power.** Those who had been mediums of the prince of darkness became channels of light, messengers of the Son of God. Men marveled as they listened to the wondrous news. A door was opened to the gospel throughout that region. **When Jesus returned to Decapolis, the people flocked about Him, and for three days, not merely the inhabitants of one town, but thousands from all the surrounding region, heard the message of salvation. [See Matthew 15:38 and Mark 8:9 regarding the feeding of the 4000 to whom the demoniac(s) had witnessed.] Even the power of demons is under the control of our Saviour, and the working of evil is overruled for good.**—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 340.2-3.†

But the purposes of Christ were not thwarted. He allowed the evil spirits to destroy the herd of swine as a rebuke to those Jews who were raising these unclean beasts for the sake of gain. Had not Christ restrained the demons, they would have plunged into the sea, not only the swine, but also their keepers and owners. The preservation of both the keepers and the owners was due alone to His power, mercifully exercised for their deliverance. Furthermore, this event was permitted to take place that the disciples might witness the cruel power of Satan upon both man and beast.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 515.1.†

10. What event do you look back on as the point at which you became a true follower of Jesus? Did you have an unusual conversion story?
11. Try to imagine yourself among the faithful followers of Jesus on crucifixion weekend. Scared to death about what might happen next and weeping uncontrollably, they had no idea what was coming. On that Sabbath, all they could think about was that bruised, scarred, bleeding

body that had been hanging on the cross. Their hopes had been completely dashed.

12. But, despite all that, on Sunday morning, the women decided that they must go to the tomb and pay their proper respects to the dead body. Try to imagine yourself walking with them, knowing that there were Roman soldiers guarding the tomb, knowing that it was covered by a stone, and wondering how they would be able to approach the body.
13. Of course, as we know, none of that was a problem. There were no soldiers there. Instead, there was an angel ready to greet them, saying: “He is not here; for He is risen.” (Matthew 28:6, *NKJV**) Try to imagine how you would have felt at that moment. Would you have just fainted? Would you have jumped up and down with gladness? There was no more crying!

Mark 16:1-11: ¹ After the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices to go and anoint the body of Jesus. ²Very early on Sunday morning, at sunrise, they went to the tomb. ³⁻⁴On the way they said to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” (It was a very large stone.) Then they looked up and saw that the stone had already been rolled back. ⁵So they entered the tomb, where they saw a young man sitting on the right, wearing a white robe—and they were alarmed.

⁶ “Don’t be alarmed,” he said. “I know you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is not here—he has been raised! Look, here is the place where they put him. ⁷Now go and give this message to his disciples, including Peter: ‘He is going to Galilee ahead of you; there you will see him, just as he told you.’”

⁸ So they went out and ran from the tomb, distressed and terrified. They said nothing to anyone, because they were afraid.

⁹ After Jesus rose from death early on Sunday, **he appeared first to Mary Magdalene**, from whom he had driven out seven demons. ¹⁰She went and told his companions. They were mourning and crying; ¹¹and when they heard her say that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, they did not believe her.—*Good News Bible*.*†

14. Ellen White suggested that Mary, coming from a different direction, actually arrived at the tomb first, learned that it was empty, and raced to tell the disciples. Then, the other women arrived and were met by the angel. After hearing Mary’s story, Peter and John raced back to the tomb to confirm what Mary had told them. Why do you think that the disciples did not believe Mary when she told them that Jesus was gone?
15. A few weeks or months later, the events recorded in Acts 4:1-20 occurred.

Acts 4:1-20: ¹ Peter and John were still speaking to the people when some priests, the officer in charge of the temple guards, and some Sadducees arrived. ²They were annoyed because the two apostles were teaching the people that Jesus had risen from death, which proved that the dead will rise to life. ³So they arrested them and put them in jail until the next day, since it was already late. ⁴But many who heard the message believed; and the number of men grew to about 5,000.

⁵ The next day the Jewish leaders, the elders, and the teachers of the Law gathered in Jerusalem. ⁶They met with the High Priest Annas and with Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and the others who belonged to the High Priest’s family. ⁷They made the apostles stand before them and asked them, “How did

you do this? What power have you got or whose name did you use?"

⁸ Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, answered them, "Leaders of the people and elders: ⁹if we are being questioned today about the good deed done to the lame man and how he was healed, ¹⁰then you should all know, and all the people of Israel should know, that **this man stands here before you completely well through the power of the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth—whom you crucified and whom God raised from death.**

¹¹ Jesus is the one of whom the scripture says:

'The stone that you the builders despised
turned out to be the most important of all.'

¹² Salvation is to be found through him alone; in all the world there is no one else whom God has given who can save us."

¹³ **The members of the Council were amazed to see how bold Peter and John were and to learn that they were ordinary men of no education. They realized then that they had been companions of Jesus.** ¹⁴ But there was nothing that they could say, because they saw the man who had been healed standing there with Peter and John. ¹⁵ So they told them to leave the Council room, and then they started discussing among themselves. ¹⁶ "What shall we do with these men?" they asked. "Everyone in Jerusalem knows that this extraordinary miracle has been performed by them, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷ But to keep this matter from spreading any further among the people, let us warn these men never again to speak to anyone in the name of Jesus."

¹⁸ So they called them back in and told them that on no condition were they to speak or to teach in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered them, "You yourselves judge which is right in God's sight—to obey you or to obey God. ²⁰ **For we cannot stop speaking of what we ourselves have seen and heard.**"—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

16. The New Testament church was growing explosively. Three thousand people were baptized on the day of Pentecost. And soon there were 5000 more. Among them were Sadducees (Acts 6:7) and Pharisees. (Acts 15:5) Think of the incredible transformation of Peter. From shrinking at the questioning by a maid working in the courtyard of Caiaphas to standing boldly before the Sanhedrin and saying: "This man stands here before you completely well through the power of the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth—whom you crucified and whom God raised from death." (Acts 4:10, *GNB**) What would you have said?
17. No wonder "the members of the Council were amazed to see how bold Peter and John were and to learn that they were ordinary man of no education. They realized then they had been companions of Jesus." (Acts 4:13 *GNB**) Would you be prepared to stand before Congress to give your testimony? Peter was testifying to something that the Sanhedrin, led by the Sadducees before him, absolutely claimed could not be true. How did he dare do that?
18. Think of the different experiences of the other disciples. And yet, out of that motley crew, Jesus welded together a group of 11 men who transformed the world.
19. So, how has the gospel impacted you?

No sooner does one come to Christ than there is born in his heart a desire to make known to others what a precious friend he has found in Jesus; **the saving and sanctifying truth cannot be shut up in his heart.**—Ellen G.

White, *Steps to Christ** 78.2.† Compare AG 305.3; DA 141.3.

20. What would happen if every Seventh-day Adventist was ready to witness? We may not be able to perform miracles as Peter and John did; but, we can bear witness. Read the story of Paul being called before King Agrippa as recorded in Acts 26. Herod Agrippa II and his sister and likely sex partner, Berenice, listened to Paul describe his experiences before conversion, then on the Damascus road, and then after conversion. Paul understood clearly that witnessing is never about us; it is always about Him. In fact, the “good news” is not about us, even about how we are saved; it is always about the One who saves us.
21. How do you understand these two passages?

1 John 1:1-3: ¹ We write to you about the Word of life, which has existed from the very beginning. We have heard it, and we have seen it with our eyes; yes, we have seen it, and our hands have touched it. ²When this life became visible, we saw it; so we speak of it and tell you about the eternal life which was with the Father and was made known to us. ³**What we have seen and heard** we announce to you also, so that you will join with us in the fellowship that we have with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.—*Good News Bible*.*†

Galatians 2:20: So that it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. This life that I live now, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave his life for me.—*Good News Bible*.*

22. It is important to remember that conversion is not a single event. It is living day-by-day in relationship with Jesus Christ. In fact, we need to be converted every day.
23. Herod Agrippa II was the son of Herod Agrippa I whose death is described in Acts 12:20-23. Thus, he was a great-grandson of Herod the Great. He had two sisters; the one he was living with was Berenice. The older sister, Drusilla, ended up being the wife, or rather the concubine, of Felix. Herod Agrippa II finally retired to Rome where he died in A.D. 100. Both Herod Agrippa II and Berenice, although in lineage partly Jewish, were Roman sympathizers.

Agrippa. See on ch. 25:13. The young king stands in striking contrast to Paul. **This last scion of a decayed line of Jewish kings, the Maccabees, and of the house of Herod, Agrippa professed to be a Jew but was at heart a Roman.** His reign marked the end of a dynasty and of an era. From the first the Herodian dynasty had been captive to Rome, and had certainly made no brilliant record. Before him stands Paul, old now, but strong in his convictions, and confident despite the circumstances. Agrippa is cynical, indifferent to real values; Paul is ardent for truth, no matter what the cost to himself.—Article on Acts 26:1. In Nichol, F. D. (Ed.). (1980). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*,* vol. 6, 436. Review and Herald Publishing Association.†

24. In his presentation, Paul did not accuse King Agrippa of any of Agrippa’s sins although he could have! He just presented his personal story and what it had done to his life. Paul’s bold testimony was the evidence of a life that had been powerfully changed by God Himself.
25. So, what is it that we should witness about? Hopefully, it is because we have a life that has meaning and excitement because of our rich relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Saviour knew that no argument, however logical, would melt hard hearts or break through the crust of worldliness and selfishness. He knew that His disciples must receive the heavenly endowment; that the gospel would be effective only as it was proclaimed by hearts made warm and lips made eloquent by a living knowledge of Him who is the way, the truth, and the

life.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles** 31.1.

26. But, we need to avoid one pitfall. Telling our personal history or even our conversion story is not intended to be a way to convince others of the truth about God and the Bible. It is a way to tell them of the excitement, the strength, the hope, and joy we have found in the freedom from guilt as well as the peace, the mercy, and the forgiveness from sin that has made such a difference in our lives.
27. We recognize that telling our personal stories might actually impact someone else to seriously think of adopting the gospel themselves. That, ultimately, would be a wonderful result. We hear stories of people who have been transformed by the gospel who had been self-centered, materialistic, business leaders or rebellious teenagers or drug addicts or alcoholics. Our story might seem tame compared to some of theirs. But, if we tell the truth and we are a real living example of what we are telling people, it will be a powerful testimony. Think of how the gospel impacted Peter, James, John, even Thomas and Philip. (John 13:34-35)
28. Remember that one or two demoniacs on the east side of the Sea of Galilee impacted the lives of thousands of people from Decapolis. We know that almost immediately, the people came out from Decapolis and asked Jesus to leave; so, His entire stay on that side of the Sea of Galilee was probably no more than a few hours. Did the Holy Spirit guide Him there just to have that encounter? The demoniac had begged to be allowed to leave with Jesus; but, he was told: **“No, go back and tell what God has done for you.”** And thus, thousands of people came a short time later to hear Jesus when He returned to that area. Do you think that former demoniac—or those former demoniacs—went from town to town holding meetings to tell people what happened to them? How did they impact the lives of so many people?

Our confession of His faithfulness is Heaven’s chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. We are to acknowledge His grace as made known through the holy men of old; but **that which will be most effectual is the testimony of our own experience.** We are witnesses for God as we reveal in ourselves the working of a power that is divine. Every individual has a life distinct from all others, and an experience differing essentially from theirs. God desires that our praise shall ascend to Him, marked by our own individuality. These precious acknowledgments to the praise of the glory of His grace, when supported by a Christ-like life, have an irresistible power that works for the salvation of souls.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 347.3.

29. Think back to the time when Jesus first called His disciples. Some of them had been following Him for one and one-half years already. But, He had not officially called them to be His followers. When He did, did they have any idea that He was calling them to be martyrs in the future? Did they have any idea that they would carry a message that would transform the world? We may not have any idea how our witness might impact those who hear us. But, we need to tell our stories anyway.
30. Do you think you would be comfortable putting together a brief story about your own experience with Jesus Christ? Think about the time before that event in your life. And then, what change happened at that point? And finally, how has your life been different since that happened? Do you think your story would be a winsome one?

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