

Witness Prayer
August 3, 2014

I know some of you find this hard to believe, but I'm shy. I'm comfortable with you all. And I've been doing this long enough to gain some confidence in public speaking. Part of this confidence is that I have planned what I'm going to say. But put me in new situations, with strangers, and I'm shy.

I'm not as shy as I used to be. But I'm still shy. I'm not an outgoing person. I'm not an extrovert. I find it hard to engage strangers in conversation. I'm especially not good at steering such conversations to spiritual matters.

My friend Bill Viel had no trouble with this. He could talk to anybody about Jesus at the drop of a hat. And he would. That's a great gift to have. But I don't have it.

I know that most of you don't have that gift either. And like me, you have trouble sharing Jesus with others. You have friends, relatives, coworkers, or neighbors who are lost. And you wish you could tell them easily, naturally about Jesus. But since it is so scary, you usually fail to try.

You want to get the good news to them in a way they will hear and understand. But despite your desire to tell them, you have trouble doing so. Your fears make you weak. You are afraid of failing, afraid of saying the wrong thing. You are afraid of making them uncomfortable and maybe messing up the relationship you already have with them.

This morning we're going to look at some Christians who had much more reason than us to be afraid to share Jesus. However, they did something that will help us in our struggle to share Jesus with others.

We start with the last words of Jesus to His hand-picked successors. These 11 guys Jesus appointed to be apostles. The word **apostle means a person who is appointed to a special task**. Jesus tells them what that special task is in Acts 1, verse 8.

Acts 1:8 (NIV) But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Jesus said, "You will be my witnesses." Why did Jesus choose them to be the witnesses? Because they were witnesses. They had witnessed Jesus alive after He had been raised from the dead. They were going to tell that they had seen Him, spent time with Him, touched Him, talked to Him, ate with Him, were taught by Him, over a 40 day period.

The eleven were going to be the witnesses. We see evidence of other Christians witnessing about Jesus. But these eleven were specially charged with this task.

As apostles they were also given special power. They were given the power to do miracles. All Christians received the Holy Spirit. All Christians were given spiritual gifts. But the eleven were given miraculous spiritual gifts. Look with me at Acts 2:43.

Acts 2:43 (NIV) Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.

Not all the Christians were doing wonders and miraculous signs. Not the 3,000 who were first converted in Acts 2, nor the other believers who also saw the resurrected Jesus. Only the eleven were doing miracles. They had been given the task to witness of the resurrected Jesus. We see another example of this power in Acts 3:1-10.

Acts 3:1-10 (NIV) One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer--at three in the afternoon. Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money.

Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.

When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

At this point a crowd gathers and wants to know how this man was healed. Peter launches into an explanation, sharing the good news about Jesus in the process, and several thousand more people become Christians. This news greatly upset the religious leaders as we pick up the story in chapter four.

Acts 4:7-13 (NIV) They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is "'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone'. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

There was nothing special about the apostles, except that they had been with Jesus. They were just ordinary fishermen. They were not highly educated. They were not overly intelligent. They were not great thinkers. They were not especially skilled or talented as public speakers. We know this from what we read the Jesus biographies and from what the religious leaders observe in response to what Peter just said.

The missionary named Paul was special. Paul was very well educated. He spoke several languages. He was trained in the Jewish religion. He was familiar with Greek and Roman philosophers. He was knowledgeable concerning Roman and Jewish culture. It is easy for us to excuse ourselves from being like him.

But the eleven were uneducated, ordinary men. They were as ordinary as we are. What made them different was NOT that they could do miracles, but that they had been with Jesus. Being with Jesus will help us too. But there is something more for us to see. Let's read on.

Acts 4:18-22 (NIV) Then they... commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

These apostles had changed. When Jesus was crucified, all the apostles ran away. They had all pledged complete allegiance to Jesus, but ran when it got dangerous to be with Jesus. Peter even denied knowing Him. But that was before the cross, before the resurrection, before they received the Holy Spirit. They were different now, just as we are. Now let's see what they do after being threatened by the same religious leaders who had Jesus executed.

Acts 4:23-26 (NIV) On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: "'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.'

This is a quote from Psalm 2 spoken by King David. He was speaking about how useless it was to try to oppose Yahweh, the all-powerful creator of heaven and earth. They were wasting their time. The apostles quote David because people are still trying to oppose God. These religious leaders were trying to fight what God was doing in Jesus.

Let's go on. They continue praying...

Acts 4:27-30 (NIV) Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

They were being threatened. did they ask for protection? No, they asked for boldness. Give us courage. Give us confidence. Give us daring. We are ready to be used as witnesses. We are ready to tell what we have seen and heard. But we are being threatened and are afraid. So, Lord, give us boldness.

And this is how God answered their prayer.

Acts 4:31 (NIV) After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

Remember, these guys were uneducated, ordinary men. They weren't special. They had experiences that you and I haven't had. But if you are a Christian, you know all you need to know to be a witness for Jesus. **You know...**

- **your own story of how God has made Himself known to you,**
- **how you came to hear of the good news of Jesus,**
- **why you chose to believe it, and**
- **what God has been doing in your life since you became a follower of Jesus.**

These four things make up your story. Your story is unique to you. No one can take this away from you or disprove it. There is power in you telling your story. You could tell it to me and I could repeat it, but I can't tell it as good as you can. No one can tell it with as much passion and authenticity as you can. There is great impact in telling your own story.

Secondly, God empowers your story with the Holy Spirit. As you tell your story, the Holy Spirit can speak to the heart of your listener. Only God can do this. You telling your story, empowered by the Holy Spirit, is everything you need to say. All that you might lack is the boldness to tell it.

So **Pray for boldness**. If you care that your friend is lost, pray for boldness. If you care that your relative is in danger of hell, pray for boldness. If you know nothing about the spiritual condition of your new neighbor pray for boldness.

Pray for boldness to invite the person over for dessert, or to your church, or to the flea market. Maybe they have children who would be interested in the soccer clinic we hope to hold next month.

Secondly, **Pray that God will prepare your way**.

God still performs miraculous signs and wonders. God still speaks to hearts. God still arranges circumstances. God still creates opportunities. God can prepare your friend's heart to hear your story. God can reveal to you the other person's interest in spiritual things. God can reveal another person's need that you can pray about and follow up on. God can give you opportunities to be bold.

Pray for boldness. Pray that God will prepare your way. Then boldly step forth to use the opportunity God provides you. We did that this week when we made follow-up visits to our VBS families. God provided the opportunities and we prayed for boldness and took advantage of the opportunities to make the visits.

Pray for boldness. Pray that God will prepare your way.

What might happen in the weeks to come if you took this seriously and asked God for boldness? What might happen in the weeks to come if you started asking God to prepare the way for you to tell your story? Let's find out.

Invitation

God still does miracles. I've experienced a few. I sometimes read of one from our missionaries. God still speaks to hearts.

Has God spoken to your heart today, convincing you that you are a sinner in need of His forgiveness?

He made that forgiveness possible by sending Jesus to die for your sins. He proved this by raising Jesus from the dead. Believe on Jesus' death and resurrection today and be forgiven right now of your sins and receive eternal life when you die.

There is a sample prayer at the end of the sermon outline in your bulletin. Confess your sinfulness to God, believe on Jesus' death and resurrection, receiving Him as your Savior. And then turn your life over to Him as your Lord.