

The Bible Speaks To Me About My Witness

Session 9: Part 1 – What Will You Tell Them?

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Session 9

What Will You Tell Them? 1

Session Overview

What, specifically, should we say to unbelievers to share faith?
Natural Man – Carnal Christian – Spiritual Christian chart
Application
Exam
Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

Learner Objectives

At the end of this session, you should:

- determine where your listeners are spiritually.
- be able to discuss someone's spiritual status.
- be able to discuss evangelistic preaching as displayed in the Bible.

Introduction

What do you say when you want to share your faith with unbelievers? The scriptures show us some good examples to apply in our own lives—whether we're talking to people who have never heard the gospel message and know nothing of God, those who are raised in the church, or even those who once walked closely with Christ but don't any longer.



What Will You Tell Them?

Notes

A few weeks before I wrote this chapter, I received a phone call from a pastor. He was concerned and sincere. He had two degrees from a Nazarene college. He had pastored several years, and yet he had a question. He had phoned four different denominational or institutional offices before he phoned me. He still needed an answer. Here was his question: “How do you make a pastoral call?”

I was proud of the pastor for seeking the answer. I felt sad that he didn’t know how to make such calls. As I’ve thought about this more, I’m convinced he was being honest about an issue that bothers many of us. We have discovered a wonderful truth, we have experienced a great spiritual reality, but our delivery system for getting our message to others hasn’t been adequately prepared. If a pastor could have such a problem, it is no surprise that many laypeople could, too.

I Don't Know What to Say

Over the years, I have heard many Christians lament their lack of witness. Commonly, I hear a statement like this: “I know I should witness, Pastor, but I don’t know what to say.”

When Jesus commissioned His disciples to witness in Luke 24:46–49, the message included seemed simple. Christ told them:

This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.

The central truth in this passage is that Christ suffered and rose from the dead. His resurrection on the third day fulfills prophecy (Matthew 16:21), thus indicating God’s control of the situation. This is an actual historic event. The fact of Christ’s resurrection from the dead means He is alive today and at work in the world. In the light of Christ’s actions, how are people to respond? They are to repent—to turn from sin. The preaching of this message in Christ’s name implies that faith is to be put in Him. The benefit that comes from this repentance and faith is the forgiveness of sins. I know of no place in Scripture that gives a simple five-point



outline of presenting the gospel. But, certainly the Luke passage shows us that all people need to hear of Christ's death and resurrection, repentance, faith, and the forgiveness of sins.

One of the best examples of evangelistic preaching in the Bible is Peter's sermon preached after the outpouring of the Spirit and recorded in Acts 2:14–41.

Leighton Ford, in *The Christian Persuader*, notes four distinctive marks in the sermon:

1. It appealed to Scripture as authoritative.
2. It centered on Jesus Christ.
3. It brought conviction and concern to the hearers.
4. It called for immediate and definite response.

Peter's sermon also pointed out that the listeners' sin played a part in crucifying Christ. "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (v. 36). The appeal was for the purpose of demonstrating that God has fulfilled His promises in Jesus. What are people to do? They are to repent and be baptized in the name of Christ. The baptism indicates both faith and public profession. Once again, the benefit is the forgiveness of sins. There is also the promise of the gift of the Spirit. The basics are stressed—the death and resurrection of Christ, repentance, faith, and the forgiveness of sins, as Jesus said in Luke 24.

We have seen that Paul's synagogue preaching and his preaching at the Areopagus were different. The difference was due to the background of the hearers. The spiritual decision process model helped us understand our need to give the elements of the message based on the prospect's readiness.

The question we are to ask ourselves to help gauge our witness is, "How much do they know?" Paul's Areopagus message grabbed people's attention where they were, gave far less detail about Christ, and emphasized judgment and repentance. It may have been a first effort by Paul, which would be followed by more specific preaching later.

A given witness should be based on the prospect's readiness and openness at that moment. As the prospect becomes hungrier, more of the message can be given. Eventually Christ's death and resurrection, repentance, faith, and the forgiveness of sins can be emphasized. The goal is to see that the prospect has enough facts so that he or she will repent and choose to follow Christ.



In the days of Jesus and Paul, the average person lived in fear of demons, fate, or magic. So, when Jesus repeatedly defeated the demons, and Paul cast the demon out of the slave girl in Philippi (Acts 16:16–18), onlookers were attracted. Paul praised Christ in Colossians 2:15, “Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” This Christ was the answer to their everyday fears. Michael Green wrote in *Evangelism*, “Perhaps the greatest single factor which appealed to the man in the street was deliverance, deliverance from demons, from Fate, from magic.”

When we remember that people of that day responded to the gospel because it met a felt need, then our witness for today is informed. What are the most felt needs of the society in which I live? In the United States of America, I believe two of the greatest felt needs are to have self-worth and to have power to live daily. Remember Dan’s testimony as a restaurant executive: He had searched for self-worth in his business endeavors, but Christ gave him a greater sense of value. The Jews to whom Jesus preached and the synagogues where Paul preached included people with a high view of the law and a deep sense of failure and sin. Forgiveness was important to them.

The need for forgiveness is still a real need today, but it is often submerged below other issues. Many people I know are so overwhelmed by the difficulties of life that power for living may be Christianity’s attraction for them. In this case, my witness may emphasize regeneration more than justification. I might say, “Bill, before I met Christ, I lived with a constant sense of worry because the problems of life were so overwhelming. Now with Christ in my life, there is a power resource for problem solving. There is a freshness and challenge to life. When God’s power brings the answer, there is peace.”

Think of the people you know in your country and circle of friends. Their felt need should help shape your testimony.

But even after we have recognized the need of shaping our testimony to have special appeal to our prospects, we are helped if we can have some basic guidelines or structure for our witness. Shortly, I will speak to this issue.



Different Spiritual Needs

Though it is true that people have different *felt needs*, we as Christians realize there are different levels of actual spiritual need. We may enter the discussion at the place of felt need. We should finish the witness at the point of real need.

We will need to cross the barriers of culture, race, language, and class to be sure the gospel is planted among all types of people. Earlier we emphasized witnessing to those with whom we are comfortable. While that is generally true, there will be times God will have a special adventure for you. By divine providence, He will take you beyond your comfort zone. You will recall that in Luke 24:46–49, Jesus commissioned the disciples to go “to all nations.” In Acts 1:8, Christ promised power for witnessing—not only to Judea and Samaria, but “to the ends of the earth.”

Christ seemed to have special concern that our circle of influence continues to widen. Christian witnesses should have a sensitive heart and discerning eye to make that happen. While a few Christians have received a missionary gift that makes them especially effective in a cross-cultural ministry, most of us will have more limited opportunities in life to help reach another group. I’ve experienced a great joy in helping to start a Cambodian ministry here in my city. Who do you know in a different group of people who needs Jesus now?

Within our immediate circle of acquaintances there will be those whose spiritual life is obviously lacking. Jesus spoke of leaving 99 sheep to seek one who had strayed (Luke 15:4). These are people who have known Christ but have drifted or fallen away from Him and who give no indication of spiritual life today. They are backslidden, as W. T. Purkiser discussed in his excellent book, *Security: The False and the True*. They need to return to Jesus. Care must be exercised in approaching many of these people. Often, they have negative or bitter feelings about God or the church. We probably will find it necessary to develop a loving friendship with them before we can expect that they will listen to the gospel afresh. We must earn the right to be heard.

Once we have developed a sufficient friendship so the backslider trusts us, we may talk to him or her about the gospel. Sometimes after deep trust has been nurtured, we may ask, “Janice, how are things going for you in your relationship with Christ?” This gives the backslider the opportunity to open up his or her need. Sometimes the backslider will admit to not living for God but will claim salvation based on a past acceptance of Christ. In this case, it is best to deal with the person in the language he or she understands. Ask one or all of these questions:



1. Are you now in fellowship with Jesus Christ?
2. What has Jesus Christ done in your life this week that indicates your relationship with Him is what it ought to be?
3. Is your relationship with Christ as meaningful and satisfying as you wish it to be?

If this prospect responds to these questions with a sense of need, my decision question would be, “Janice, would you like to renew your relationship with Christ?”

Notice that this line of discussion does not debate the loss of the person’s salvation; rather, it emphasizes the renewing of relationship. I understand the Scripture to teach that Christ’s blessings (including eternal life) only come to us as we are “in Christ” (Ephesians 1). I am reminded (and would remind my friend) that Christ is saying, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20).

Further, I would share that the people to whom Christ gives this challenge are described in verse 16: “So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”

The concern of God is to take people beyond conversion. Note the purpose of preaching in Col. 1:28: “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.” When the news reached headquarters in Jerusalem that Samaria had received the Word of God under Philip, a high-powered preaching team was dispatched for a second round of revival preaching. Peter and John prayed for these Samaritan believers “that they might receive the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:15). For the exemplary Christians at Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:3–7), Paul expressed concern that something was lacking in their faith (3:10). Paul then prayed that God himself would “sanctify you through and through” (5:23). Even more, Paul was certain He would do it (v. 24).

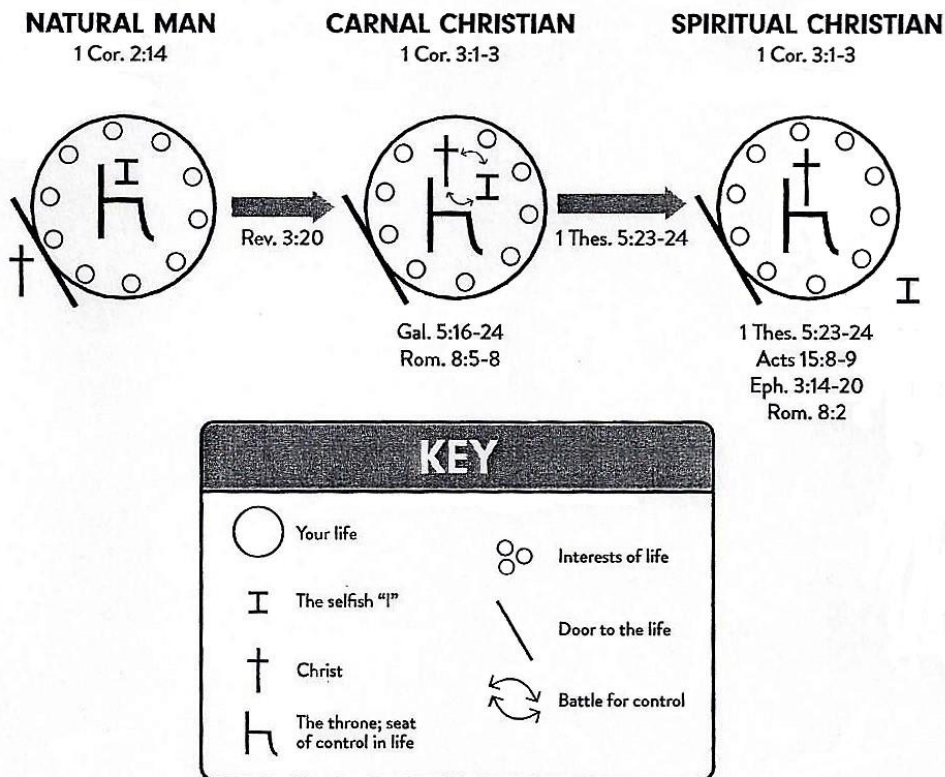
There is an emerging hunger in the Christian world today for a life of victory over sin and power for living and witness. Often the Christian world senses the hunger but doesn’t know the answer. Thank God, there is an answer! We need to experience it and share it. Christians need to witness to other Christians about the possibility of the sanctified life.

I urge Christians to ask this question of other Christians, “Since you have found Christ, have you also made the wonderful discovery of what it is to be sanctified entirely?”



Sometimes I alter the question so that my final words are “what it is to be filled with the Spirit.” The change is dependent on my knowledge of the person’s background and understanding.

Then I will use my adaptation of Campus Crusade’s circles representing spiritual life. I find that a simple explanation of these circles turns on many lights for people. Following are three circles representing the possible lives people live. The key explains what each symbol stands for. The accompanying Scripture passage explains what each symbol stands for.



Then I may ask, “Which circle most represents your present life?” Further: “Which circle most represents the life you’d like to have?” Often with an explanation of the conditions of consecration, cleansing, and faith, people are ready to pray.⁷

When you share your testimony or witness to people—whether you witness to salvation or entire sanctification—you are an expert. You are telling what Jesus did for you. There is no argument against it. It is Peter’s “We cannot help speaking



about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). It is John’s “The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us” (1 John 1:2). Take courage! You are the authority on what happened to you.

Rapport

All of us feel uncomfortable with approaching a person and immediately asking, “Are you saved?” It’s too abrupt. It’s too personal. It doesn’t fit the normal patterns of conversation.

Questions about one’s spiritual welfare are personal too. We must earn the right to be heard, to ask personal questions. The process to earning that right is called establishing rapport. Let me define rapport: a deep enough understanding of each other so as not to be afraid to share with each other deep, personal things.

Jesus built rapport with the woman at the well by making a request, “Will you give me a drink?” (John 4:7). When Jesus met Zacchaeus, who had taken initiative by climbing a tree to be sure he could see Him. Jesus’ words were not immediately religious. Rather, they would build confidence for a future conversation: “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today” (Luke 19:5). To the disciples of John, Jesus began with an open-ended question, “What do you want?” (John 1:38). They could say as much or as little as they desired.

Even in Peter’s bold preaching in Acts, another event became the natural bridge into his message. The Pentecost sermon (2:14–41) was built on the amazement of those who had just seen the results of the outpouring of the Spirit. His message in 3:12–26 was built on the crowd’s astonishment in observing the healed lame man.

When we wish to witness to a person, we too need to build on previous conversations. A good starting place is to discover what’s important to people in their everyday secular lives, even as Jesus talked about a drink with the thirsty woman at the well.

The letters H-E-L-P suggest four areas of life most people are comfortable to discuss. H stands for home, E for employment or job, L for loved ones, and P for pleasures or pastimes (hobbies, sports, etc.). As people relax in discussing these issues, move to a more significant topic. Ask about their church background. Church background is less threatening than talking about their spiritual life. You might tie



into what they've told you about their childhood. For example, say, "Tom and Frances, did you have the privilege of attending Sunday School or church as a child?"

You have now moved from secular life to church background. If they have visited your church, it will be natural to discuss your church a bit. Then you are at the place where you are ready to share your testimony.

This natural progression of subjects is not threatening. Following this paragraph, I include an outline of a way to present the gospel. Sense the natural flow as we move from their secular life to their church background to our church to testimony. (I realize this outline looks complicated. Hold steady. At this point, only look at the first four items under "I. The Introduction.")

Outline of the Gospel Presentation

I. THE INTRODUCTION

- A. Their secular life
- B. Their church background
- C. Our church
- D. Testimony—personal and/or church
- E. Two Diagnostic Questions:

1. *Remember the children's prayer, "If I should die before I wake . . . "?*
Have you come to the place in your life where you know for certain that if you were to die today you would go to heaven? Or is that something you are still working on?

Transitional question: Would you like for me to share with you how I made that discovery and how you can know it too?

2. Suppose that you were to die tonight and stand before God and He were to say to you, "Why should I let you into My heaven?" What would you say?

II. THE GOSPEL



A. Grace

1. Eternal life *including heaven* is a free gift (Rom. 6:23).
2. It is not earned or deserved (Eph. 2:8–9).

Illustration: Parent giving gift to child.

B. Humanity

1. Each person has sinned (Rom. 3:23).
2. *A person can't save himself or herself* (Eph. 2:9). *Illustration: One rotten egg in omelet.*

C. God

1. Is merciful; He wants you to go to heaven (2 Pet. 3:9).
2. Is just; therefore holds us accountable for our sins (Rom. 6:23).

Illustration: Young lawyer—savior, judge, or criminals before God.

D. Christ

1. Who He is—the God-man (John 1:1, 14).
2. What He did—
 - a. He suffered and died for our sins (Isa. 53:6).
 - b. He arose from the dead and is in heaven preparing a place for us (John 14:1-2).
 - c. Offers us a gift of eternal life (1 John 5:11–12). *Illustration: Transfer of iniquity, using a book.*

E. Faith

1. What it is not—mere intellectual assent or temporal faith (James 2:19).
2. What it is—repenting of our sins and trusting Christ alone for eternal life (Mark 1:15 and John 1:12).

Illustration: Transfer weight to another chair.



III. THE COMMITMENT

- A. The clarifying question: Does this make sense to you?
- B. The commitment question: Would you like to receive *Christ* and the gift of eternal life (Rev. 3:20)?
- C. The clarification of commitment. (Rev. 3:20 and 19) *Illustration: penny jar.*
- D. The prayer of commitment.
- E. The assurance of eternal life (John 6:47).

IV. BEGINNING NURTURE

- A. Witness
- B. Worship
- C. Bible Study
- D. Prayer
- E. Perseverance

Application

Study the key symbols and Scriptures in Natural Man - Carnal Christian - Spiritual Christian and imagine you were explaining them to a spiritually hungry Christian wanting to go deeper in Christian life. Verbalize what you have been thinking to an imaginary friend.





EXAM – Session 9

1 Commonly, Christians say, "I know I should witness, Pastor, but I don't know what to say." Surely their witness should include _____

- a) Christ suffered and rose from the dead.
- b) repentance and forgiveness.
- c) the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.
- d) an appeal to felt need.
- e) All of the above

2. Often, you will discover a Christian who seeks greater victory over sin or greater spiritual power. Pictures or diagrams were used to explain what it means to be sanctified or filled with the Spirit. Which symbol correctly conveys a truth?

- _____
- a)  Battle for control
 - b) | The most important
 - c) \ The sign of uncertainty
 - d)  The place of comfort

3. To build rapport, we discuss everyday life issues with the individual with whom we are sharing. The letters H-E-L-P guide us. They each stand for an area of life. Which does not fit or is not true? _____

- a) Home
- b) Energy
- c) Loved ones
- d) Pleasures or Pastimes



Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

1. Discuss the Natural Man - Carnal Christian - Spiritual Christian. How could this be a way to explain a deeper spiritual life to a Christian?
2. What are at least three things you would include in your testimony to God's saving grace? Participant and Mentor both share.
3. Imagine your mentor is a backslider claiming to be a Christian. What might you say to your mentor to open up a spiritual conversation?