

SESSION 11

WITNESS

WHEN THE RISEN JESUS met His disciples on Easter evening, He told them they were His witnesses. He showed how the Old Testament witnessed to His past work as Messiah and His people's future work on mission. Then Jesus commissioned His people to be witnesses to the whole world through the power of His Spirit.

STEPS TO PREPARE

1. Read the main passages for this study, recording your insights and questions:
 - ▷ Luke 24:44-49
2. Review the Teaching Plan (pp.116-119).
 - ▷ Refine the lesson plan based on your group's particular needs.
 - ▷ Adjust the plan if necessary.
3. Study the Expanded Lesson Content (pp.120-125).
 - ▷ Determine what elements of this lesson are most applicable to your particular group.
 - ▷ Consider ways to personalize the lesson content for you and your class.
4. Pray for the Lord's guidance as you lead your group through this material.

LESSON OUTLINE

AS THE CHURCH, CHRISTIANS ARE TO...

1. ***Uphold the Bible (Luke 24:44-45).***
2. ***Preach the gospel (Luke 24:46-47).***
3. ***Testify to the world (Luke 24:48-49).***

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TEACHING PLAN

WITNESS

CONNECT

OPTION 1

Distinguish between two kinds of witnesses and their resulting changes (p.120).



What is a remarkable sight that changed your perspective?

OPTION 2

For this option, call on volunteers to share a story of one of the most exciting things that ever happened to them. You can begin by starting with yourself, or as an alternative, you can tell three elaborate stories about yourself, only one of which is true, and then lead students to guess the story that is true.

Explain to students that while we all have exciting stories to tell, if we are followers of Christ, the most important story that we can tell others is the story of how we met Jesus and the work He is doing within our lives.

Feel free to use the questions below to have a brief discussion with students before moving to the transition part of the session.



What are some things you enjoy talking to others about?

Why is it that we naturally talk about the things we love and enjoy? Why should this truth also apply to our beliefs in Christ? What might it say about the condition of our hearts if we never talk about Christ with others?

TRANSITION

In this session, we will take a look at the risen Jesus' words when He met His disciples on Easter evening. He told them they were His witnesses. He showed how the Old Testament witnessed to His past work as Messiah and His people's future work on mission. Then Jesus commissioned His people to be witnesses to the whole world through the power of His Spirit.

CONVEY**AS THE CHURCH, CHRISTIANS ARE TO...****1. UPHOLD THE BIBLE.**

Read Luke 24:44-45. Show how the whole Bible witnesses to Jesus as the Messiah and testifies of God's love for the people He has created (p.121).



At this point, consider using the story "Perfect Witness" in the Personal Study Guide (p.93) as a way to illustrate this point. A brief synopsis has been provided for you in the sidebar.



How should what Jesus said about the Old Testament affect both our interpretation of it as well as our attention to it?



Knowing we need the Lord to open our eyes to understand His Word, how can we become better Bible interpreters?

Describe what "people of the Book" should mean (p.122).



What role does understanding the big picture of what God has always been up to have in our understanding the Bible?

2. PREACH THE GOSPEL.

Ask a volunteer to read Luke 24:46-47. Explain that Jesus' mission would continue through the sending of His followers to proclaim the gospel in two aspects: repentance and forgiveness. First, repentance (pp.122-123).



At this point, consider using the story "Learning Repentance" in the Personal Study Guide (p.95) as a way to illustrate this point. A brief synopsis has been provided for you in the sidebar.



If someone asked you what repentance means, what would you say? Why is it important that we call people to repentance as we share the gospel?

Explain that repentance is our heartfelt response to God's kindness. Say that repentance is about turning around and coming into the light. Then ask five volunteers to read a description of the nature of repentance.



If someone asked you what "forgiveness of sins" means, what would you say? How do we talk to people about forgiveness of sins if they do not see themselves as sinners?

Communicate that in addressing the sin of others, for which forgiveness is needed, Christians must remember that we too are sinners who have been forgiven (pp.123-124).

PERFECT WITNESS

Witnesses are an important part of the legal system in our country. Lawyers rely on witnesses to help them prove their case and disprove the case of the opposition. Sometimes witnesses do a great job and provide exactly what the case needs. Other times, they crumble on the stand. Unlike earthly witnesses, the Bible provides a rock solid witness to the truth of Jesus as the Messiah. Though witnesses may choose to lie on the stand, Scripture is complete truth. All the pages of Scripture point to the coming Messiah, and Jesus fulfills every prophecy written in Scripture.

► *How does knowing the Bible is a perfect witness increase your faith?*

LEARNING REPENTANCE

When we become part of God's family, we also become part of the mission of God. That mission is to spread the gospel of repentance and forgiveness to the world around us. One of the ways that we can be a witness is to tell our own stories of repentance and forgiveness. What a wonderful God we serve!

► *When have you repented? Why?*

COMMUNITY MINISTRY

When we think of going into all the world as witnesses, it is easy to pass that responsibility off to those who go overseas in missions. But the truth of the matter is, we are all missionaries. While it is so important to reach those around the world who have never heard about Jesus, there are probably people in your own backyard who have never heard of Him either. Let's be faithful witnesses, and let the witness begin here at home.

► *How are you being a witness in your community?*

NOTES:



When was the last time you repented openly about something you've done wrong? What were the circumstances?



What role does your own experience of forgiveness play in your sharing the gospel with others?

3. TESTIFY TO THE WORLD.

Read Luke 24:48-49. Apply the teaching of this passage to today—think of the nations and start at home. Discuss the two reasons why we should start at home (p.124).



At this point, consider using the story “Community Ministry” in the Personal Study Guide (p.97) as a way to illustrate this point. A brief synopsis has been provided for you in the sidebar.



Is your church more passionate about local missions or global missions? Why? How can you increase passion for both elements of our mission? Why is this important?

Communicate that “witness” is an identity requiring the power of the Holy Spirit in us (p.125).



Why is it significant that Jesus gives us the identity of “witness,” not just the task of “witnessing”?



How can we be “witnesses” in our different spheres of life? At home? At work? At school?

COLLIDE

In this session, we look at what it means for the church to be a witness. Much like the Bible testifies and witnesses to the person and work of Jesus and the church's overall mission as a whole, we too are to be witnesses of Him who saved us to a lost and dying world.



How has this lesson challenged you in your walk with Christ?

For students, finding direction in life can be challenging. Even students who are believers struggle to know what direction their life should take. While many use the terminology of finding and understanding “God’s will” for their lives, just as many misunderstand what that means from a biblical perspective.



What are some areas within your life where you constantly seek direction? How would you counsel someone who was seeking direction in similar areas?

One of the great takeaways from this session is that it helps to answer some of the directional questions that every student asks. In a big-picture sense, every student, if a believer, is called to be a living witness of Christ to the world around them. While the details and specifics of how that plays out will vary from student to student, the overall direction and big-picture will for their lives is the same—make much of Jesus in all that they do.



*Why is it encouraging to know God's big plan for your life?
How will this effect your decisions and the way you live?*



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at
GospelProject.com/AdditionalResources

And for ***free online training*** on how to lead a group visit
MinistryGrid.com/web/TheGospelProject

NOTES:

SESSION 11

by Jason C Dukes

EXPANDED LESSON CONTENT

WITNESS

AS THE CHURCH, CHRISTIANS ARE TO UPHOLD THE BIBLE, PREACH THE GOSPEL, AND TESTIFY TO THE WORLD.

OPENING ILLUSTRATION AND DISCUSSION STARTER

VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

The early followers of Jesus...were called the people of 'the Way.' They were known for the way they lived, not only for what they believed or valued. Christians were associated with a particular and discernible way of living and relating that both grew out of their faith and gave testimony to that faith.¹

—Inagrace T. Dietterich



There are two kinds of witnesses. The first is someone who sees something happen. The second is someone who has had something happen to them. Both kinds of witnesses are important. But the first kind changes your perspective; the second kind changes your identity.

Consider these examples from Scripture, examples of witnesses who were forever changed after an encounter with God. Abram became Abraham. Moses went from refugee to deliverer. Ruth went from being a widow picking up leftovers to being the wife of the landowner. One day, David was

a shepherd boy; the next, he was anointed king. Mary was an ordinary teenager until an angel told her she would be the mother of the Messiah. On the road to Damascus, Paul went from murderer to missionary. The list could go on.

There's a difference between watching others follow Jesus and following Him daily ourselves. The former is witnessing something. The latter has become a witness of Someone.



What is something remarkable you have seen that changed your perspective?

VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

The church's mission flows from the identity of God and His Christ. When you know who God is, when you know who Jesus is, witnessing mission is the unavoidable outcome.²

—Christopher Wright

AS THE CHURCH, CHRISTIANS ARE TO...

1. UPHOLD THE BIBLE (LUKE 24:44-45).

Then He told them, “These are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. (Luke 24:44-45)

Proclaiming Jesus is not just one aspect of the Bible; it's the primary purpose of this divinely inspired Word. The first witness we see in this passage is God Himself, revealing His character through human authors in order to prepare the way for Jesus and then proclaim Him as the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). Jesus claimed that the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms spoke of Him. Then He opened the minds of His disciples to understand the Old Testament.



How should what Jesus said about the Old Testament affect both our interpretation of it as well as our attention to it?

From beginning to end, the Bible teaches that God loves the people He has created. His love motivated Him to become “God with us” even though we had chosen to become “us without God.” The God from whom we desperately need salvation made His residence among us (John 1:14), just as the Old Testament had foretold and foreshadowed.

That all of the Bible witnesses to Jesus helps us understand what it means for God to make us witnesses to Him. Though the Bible tells one big story, the Bible is not just one book. It is a collection of 66 writings from those who became witnesses of the God who revealed Himself to us in history.

Consider how powerful of a witness the Bible is! Witnesses from throughout history all related distinct stories that somehow weave together to reveal a central pattern and a specific Person. The Bible witnesses to Jesus through various personalities and in different ways. And we witness to Jesus (albeit imperfectly) through our various personalities.

The passage above says that Jesus opened the eyes of His disciples to show how the Bible was pointing to Himself. Like the first-century disciples, we need Christ to open our minds in order to understand the Scriptures. We need His Spirit to help us see how God's Word serves as a witness to Jesus.



Knowing we need the Lord to open our eyes to understand His Word, how can we become better Bible interpreters?

Why did Jesus feel it was important to focus the disciples' attention on how the Law pointed to Him? Perhaps it was because they relied on the Law to understand their relationship with God and their purpose in life. Jesus wanted His followers to understand that His teaching revealed God's



FURTHER COMMENTARY

Jesus walks the disciples through the Scripture, functioning like a prophet in revealing God's plan. Luke's language is general, and Jesus specifies no particular texts, only the basic topic (24:46-47). Likely texts for such an exposition are those that were used for Christological points in Acts...What is given is understanding and insight into God's plan. Since these disciples have witnessed God's plan and now understand it, they are commissioned to proclaim it.³

—Darrell L. Bock



FURTHER COMMENTARY

According to Jesus, the Old Testament witnessed to Him long before He was born. This Old Testament witness to Jesus was difficult to detect, however. In one of His last ‘sermons,’ Jesus scolded two of His disciples on the way to Emmaus, ‘Oh how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into His glory?’ (Luke 24:25-26)...Jesus believed that Moses and all the prophets bore witness to Him, the incarnate Christ.⁴

—Sidney Greidanus

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

The Bible points forward to Christ, backward to Christ, and again forward to Christ in His glorious return and reign.⁵

—Herschel Hobbs

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

Cut the Bible anywhere and it will bleed. The blood of Jesus stains every page.⁶

—Adrian Rogers

FURTHER COMMENTARY

On this occasion Jesus went beyond showing how prophecy was fulfilled in His passion and resurrection. It was also fulfilled in the preaching of repentance and forgiveness of sins...In His name connects this repentance and forgiveness with what Jesus is and has done. People are not called to a repentance based on general principles and to a forgiveness always available. Luke is speaking about what Christ has done for people and what is available through Him... It is no petty forgiveness available for a few pious or nationalistic souls, but for all people...The gospel is to be preached to all nations and the witness to Christ is to be made.⁷

—Leon Morris

intent from the very beginning. He wasn't creating a new "religion"; He was clarifying and completing God's plan for His people.

This truth is significant for us still today. Christians often declare themselves to be "people of the Book." But to truly be a "people of the Book," we cannot be satisfied merely with emphasizing the laws we find in the Bible or the moral code the Bible lays out. Truly being a "people of the Book" means we embody the grace and truth of Jesus, the Savior who came to give us a new identity as beloved sons and daughters in the family of God. All the Bible witnesses to the Messiah, and it is the Messiah's love that changes our identity and our understanding of life and purpose.



What role does understanding the big picture of what God has always been up to have in our understanding the Bible?

2. PREACH THE GOSPEL (LUKE 24:46-47).

We've seen that the Bible is first a witness to Jesus—the Messiah. The Bible witnesses to the saving work of Jesus. His mission to provide atonement was "finished" when He suffered and died and then rose as the firstborn from among the dead (Col. 1:15-20). Now He invites us on mission with Him to announce His loving lordship.

Note the connection in the passage below from the Messiah's mission to the church's mission. See how Jesus speaks of the Bible witnessing to His own life and work, and then how effortlessly He moves to speaking of His people's life and work? Jesus redeemed us, paying the cost of our sin through His death, so that in His life we might live together with Him and with one another to demonstrate His love to a lost and lonely world.

He also said to them, "This is what is written: The Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. (Luke 24:46-47)

So, the Bible witnesses to Jesus the Messiah and to the church's mission. Why do these two truths go together? Because the disciples' mission is part of God's overarching mission that has existed since before the foundation of the earth (Eph. 1:3-14). Jesus wanted the disciples to recognize that the mission the Father sent Him on would continue through the sending of His followers (John 17:18; 20:21).

Now let's take a moment to consider the proclamation at the heart of the church's mission. Jesus sums up the "gospel"—the "good news" we are to proclaim in verse 47: "repentance for forgiveness of sins." Two aspects of the gospel come into focus here: repentance and forgiveness. Let's start with the meaning of "repentance."



If someone asked you what repentance means, what would you say? Why is it important that we call people to

repentance as we share the gospel?

When the idea of repentance gets isolated from its biblical context, people tend to think of a would-be prophet holding a sign that says, “Turn or Burn!” But if we take our cue from Jesus, who just got through teaching about how the Old Testament pointed to Him, we will take a step back and see the meaning of repentance from within the biblical story line.

The word *repent* means “to turn around” or “change directions.” The reason repentance is needed (and called for) is because Adam and Eve, in the garden of Eden, made a choice to live apart from the love and goodness of God. In their rebellion, they sinned. Then they ran and hid from the God who made them. But God came to find His wayward creatures, and though He knew where Adam was hiding, still He asked, “Where are you?”

Where are you? Repentance is a heartfelt response to the kindness of a God who grieves the lostness of His people and aches for us to be rescued, to be with Him once again giving Him praise and honor forever. Sin and selfishness lead us to hide from God in the dark. But the God of the gospel asks, “Where are you?” (Gen. 3:9). Repentance is about turning around and coming into the light. Repentance is rethinking the choice to seek abundant life from any other source but God.

To call people to repentance is not to say, “Change your life,” but to invite people to run to the God who changes us. It means we plead with people: “Please come out from the darkness of your hiding into the light of His love. Please believe that He is not here to condemn you but to save you. Please turn away from (repent of) trusting in yourself, and turn to the gracious arms of the only Savior who can forgive your sins. Believe that He wants to give you abundant life rather than eternal destruction.” When the church proclaims repentance, it should be with tears and pleas reflecting the heart of a loving God.

Now let’s turn to the other element of our proclamation—“forgiveness of sins”—an idea that is sometimes difficult to grasp in a culture where people rarely think of themselves as sinful.



If someone asked you what “forgiveness of sins” means, what would you say? How do we talk to people about forgiveness of sins if they do not see themselves as sinners?

The church proclaims the gospel—the only message that can bring forgiveness of sins. It is true that many people today have a hard time seeing themselves as sinners in need of salvation. But may I suggest that too many Christians also have a hard time recognizing their sinfulness? Perhaps before we speak honestly to our neighbors about their sin, we should be up front and honest about our own.

Too often the church says, “Here’s how to be a better person,” to a world wondering, “How can I be forgiven?” It does little good to chide a lost person

VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

Faith in God's forgiveness does not merely mean a persuasion that I am off the hook. It means savoring the truth that a forgiving God is the most precious reality in the universe.⁸

—John Piper

FURTHER COMMENTARY

Luke saw the role of the disciples as witnesses as assuring the veracity of the message. The disciples were not just proclaimers of Jesus' message but eyewitnesses who were to share their personal experience of the risen Christ. The earlier mission of the Twelve (Luke 9:1-6) and the seventy (10:1-12) were a proleptic foretaste of the future mission of Jesus' witnesses after the resurrection...The verb [in v. 49] is a futuristic present (literally 'I am sending') that emphasizes the certainty of what God was about to do. This promise was the coming of the Spirit (Acts 1:4-5; cf. also 2:33; Gal. 3:14; Eph. 1:13) and refers to the OT promise of the Spirit's coming (cf. also Luke 3:16). Luke thought above all of Joel 2:28-32 (Acts 2:16-21). As in John 16:7, Jesus Himself sends the Spirit. In John 14:16,26 the Father sends the Spirit.⁹

—Robert Stein

for being lost. The message of forgiveness is not delivered by sinless, perfect people; "forgiveness of sins" is proclaimed in Jesus' name by forgiven sinners.

One of the best ways to proclaim the truth of God's forgiveness is to confess your own sinfulness, and to model the reality of forgiveness with God's people. The Bible witnesses to the church's mission by giving us the message of repentance and forgiveness of sins, and then the Spirit empowers us to live as repentant, forgiven sinners. When the church lives as a people in need of a Savior, many in our world will be more open to the Savior.

When we openly admit our own sin and point people to the gracious God who loves us and wants to be reconciled to us, we are witnesses of Jesus.



When was the last time you repented openly about something you've done wrong? What were the circumstances?



What role does your own experience of forgiveness play in your sharing the gospel with others?

3. TESTIFY TO THE WORLD (LUKE 24:48-49).

We've seen that the Bible witnesses to Jesus as the Messiah and then connects Jesus' messiahship to the church's mission of proclaiming repentance and forgiveness of sins. Now we look at Jesus' words to see what He says about our identity. Notice that the previous verse (v. 47) focused on where the proclamation of the gospel will go—to all the nations. How will this message get there? Verses 48-49 show us:

You are witnesses of these things. And look, I am sending you what My Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered from on high." (Luke 24:48-49)

As God's people, we are Christ's witnesses to the world. The where of our mission is "everywhere," but the mission began in Jerusalem. The mission began where the disciples were, and then it spread to the ends of the earth.

To apply this today, think of the nations and start at home. The mission of the church is global, but it starts in "Jerusalem." Why?

- (1) Because there are people running from God and hiding in their loneliness and selfishness right here in our neighborhoods and communities. And (2) because we need to learn how to respond to and communicate and embody the gospel right where we are before we can expect to be effective in proclaiming the gospel elsewhere.



Is your church more passionate about local missions or global missions? Why? How can you increase passion for both elements of our mission? Why is this important?

Witnessing is not just something you do. “Witness” is who you are. Christ has declared that we are His witnesses. It is an identity, not just an activity.

“You are witnesses...” Of what? “These things” refers to all that Christ has accomplished. The disciples were eyewitnesses of Jesus’ suffering and resurrection. We may not have seen Jesus crucified and raised with our physical eyes, but we are witnesses to this God who has saved us.

We are witnesses to the truth that God has always been patiently, clearly, and graciously communicating to us that He wants us with Him.

We are witnesses to the truth that God sent Jesus to demonstrate the fierceness and fullness of His love for us.

We are witnesses to the truth that Jesus now sends us to continue that clear communication of His love.

How can we live up to such an identity? Not through our own power but through His Spirit. Jesus’ first instructions to His disciples were not to go to the nations but to go and wait. They needed the Spirit before they could accomplish this task. The same is true of us. The God we proclaim as Immanuel—God with us—must truly be with us as we share and show His love. The way He draws near and empowers us is through His Spirit.



Why is it significant that Jesus gives us the identity of “witness,” not just the task of “witnessing”?



How can we be “witnesses” in our different spheres of life? At home? At work? At school?

CONCLUSION

To be a witness does not mean you are just trying to get people to change religions, or adhere to Christian morality. To be a witness means you are representing the truth of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection and lordship. It means your identity is defined by the love of God shown most clearly in the cross of Jesus Christ. You are a witness of Someone, not just something.

May we be compelled daily to speak and show who Jesus is, to live according to our identity as His witnesses, so that the world will come to know their God-intended, cross-driven, Jesus-fulfilled, Spirit-empowered identity. We are loved by, listening to, and living with Jesus. We are His witnesses.

VOICES FROM THE CHURCH

Mission is both the announcement and the demonstration of the reign of God through Christ.¹⁰

—Michael Frost

VOICES FROM CHURCH HISTORY

If you are going to serve Christ to the very ends of the earth, take care that you begin at home.¹¹

—Charles Spurgeon

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