

Can I Get A Witness?

Just outside your door are countless unbelievers who need to hear the gospel. What's preventing you from reaching them?

One of the most heart-rending stories I've ever read is found in the Bible in Judges 19. It contains a message for every 21st century believer.

The story tells of a young woman who was savagely and mercilessly abused all night long by a group of men. After this tragic experience, she managed to make her way back home, but being in a very feeble state, she collapsed outside.

When her husband discovered her lifeless body, she was lying in the doorway of the house with her hands on the threshold.

It's a dreadful story, I know. But wrapped up in it is a great truth, as well as a challenge and a word of encouragement for you and me.

Note that the young woman in Judges was beaten to the point of fatal collapse at what could have been the doorway to safety. It's not hard to picture the American Pentecostal-charismatic church in somewhat the same situation.

When it comes to reaching the unchurched, we've taken a great beating and lost some ground in this generation. But the results of a recent Charisma survey, coupled with what I believe is a growing hunger in Christians, seem to indicate a shift is on the horizon. We might well be on the threshold of a great harvest. What is the individual believer's responsibility for helping to gather in this harvest, and how do we fulfill it? Romans 8:19 exhorts us to maintain an aggressive perspective regarding our role in the earth today. This verse reminds us that "the creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed" (NIV).

The church is not only Christ's body and a family but also a force that must be unleashed in today's world. In all actuality, the world is waiting for people who have Jesus in their lives and are not afraid to show it! Buildings, programs, high-tech equipment and personalities are never quite enough to see lives transformed.

Heaven fully understands the necessity of the gospel to be spread through every individual believer and has provided the necessary enablement to make evangelism effective, even in our contemporary society. What is the divine enablement designated by God to empower evangelism? It is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' words to His disciples still ring true today: "'But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth'" (Acts 1:8, NKJV).

The baptism of the Holy Spirit is by no means a mark of superior spirituality. Its primary purpose, according to Scripture, is to empower us to reach our world. One pastor said the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit in his church is "people talking with other people" about Christ. Does the baptism of the Holy Spirit really make a difference in helping us to evangelize?

Of those who responded to our survey, 96 percent have shared their faith with an unsaved person and 75 percent have prayed with someone to receive Christ. So the answer according to our findings is yes! The baptism of the Holy Spirit does do what God intended.

Yet according to other surveys and studies conducted in the recent past, we are still facing a growing non-Christian culture. In fact, such studies show that America is rapidly becoming an "unchurched people."

Our survey indicates that the overwhelming majority of Spirit-

filled believers have at one time or another shared their faith with an unsaved person. Then why the negative trend? Because almost two-thirds of believers witness no more than once a month at the most.

Why might that be?

- Have we taken our separation from the world too far?
- Have we neglected to incorporate sharing our faith into the normal lifestyle and righteous routine that we've established for our walk with Jesus?
- Are we more concerned with our own situation than we are with that of others?
- Are we avoiding the "one thing" Jesus asked us to do? Incidentally, this one thing is also known as the Great Commission. Often it seems more convenient to pursue other spiritual matters so that our ongoing involvement in witnessing gets postponed.

There are many more reasons believers don't venture to share their faith, but one of the greatest hindrances, I believe, is fear. You determine you're going to talk to someone about spiritual matters, and suddenly a tidal wave of rejection rushes through your mind.

This fear is straight from the pit of hell-a clear-cut attack from the enemy that leaves you beaten up and nearly lifeless, lying at the threshold of reaching others with the gospel. The antidote is faith in God and reliance on the Holy Spirit to help you in your weakness.

Remember these verses: "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4, KJV); "You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you" (Phil. 4:13, NKJV).

Thresholds were meant to be crossed, not places of death

and burial. Here are three steps you can take to help you move beyond the threshold and cross over to the harvest waiting right outside your door:

See past the threshold. Jesus told His followers, "'Lift up your eyes and look at the fields'" (John 4:35). The idea is to begin to notice the people around you who need Jesus.

In the New Testament, the term "harvest" often refers to people who are ready and waiting to hear the gospel. It is a call to see beyond people's appearances and temporal situations and zero in on their need for God.

Do you acknowledge the immeasurable value God has placed on every human being? God said, "'Let Us make man in Our image'" (Gen. 1:26). This means each person has potential in God's sight.

Do you consider the possibility of reaching others very real? After all, nothing is impossible with God (see Luke 1:37).

What do you see when you look at your neighbor, your community or your country? See beyond the point of beginning. Even negative situations in another's life can be a touch point for the gospel.

Remember: Darkness creates a stage for light. Wounds are candidates for healing. Tragedy can open the door for miracles.

Think beyond the threshold. What is it you believe about being personally involved in the Great Commission? Do you allow your mind-set to motivate you, or to stop you at the threshold?

- Do you believe sharing the gospel is a mandate from God?

- Do you believe that what you “see” on the other side of the threshold can come to pass-with God’s help?
- Do you believe that the power for being a witness was given you when you were baptized in the Holy Spirit?
- Do you believe Jesus saves?
- Do you believe Jesus can save anybody-even the most unlikely person?
- Do you believe Jesus can save anyone using you?

What you believe will determine how successful you are at reaping the harvest by helping others come to know Christ.

When people tell me negative things about a city before I minister there, I get excited. Why? Because I anticipate an even greater breakthrough for harvest. I have learned that God can do amazing things through any man or woman who will let Him do things His way.

If we want to keep from dying on the threshold, our thoughts and belief systems as well as our sight must go beyond the doorway. When they do, it will be simple for us to follow the final step.

Move beyond the threshold. Reach it and then cross over to the harvest. You can’t let anything stop you at this point, not even lack of experience. Learning how to witness is the easiest obstacle to overcome: Just start talking about what has happened in your own life and the Person to whom you give all the credit.

Ignore the cultural voice that warns you to make certain everything you say is politically correct and that you should not flaunt your faith in the marketplace. It is possible for the righteous to be as bold as a lion without being obnoxious.

Let your Christianity be defined by the action you take to reach others, for the words of Jesus are as true

today as in His time: “‘The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest’” (Matt. 9:37-38).

Do you want to be one of the laborers? Sure you do. Don't die on the threshold; cross over now and give witness to the One who has made a difference in your life. Your testimony will make a difference in someone else's.

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Go Ahead, Break the Ice

Statistics reveal that few Christians actually share their faith actively. Here's how you can start the conversation.

Last year Charisma polled readers to discover how active they were in personal evangelism. We learned that even though all participants believe God wants them to tell others about Jesus, more than half said they share their faith only a few times a year.

One question was particularly revealing: If you don't share your faith regularly, why don't you?

36%: “I'm scared to.”

14%: “I don't know how to.”

29%: “I don't believe I should push my faith on anyone.”

21%: “I believe there are better ways to evangelize.”

We also asked what factors might prompt them to be more

active in evangelism. They listed three:

1. If I had a friend encouraging me to do it more often (47%).
2. If I had someone more experienced with me (29%).
3. If I had taken an evangelism class and felt trained (24%).

Many people who battle timidity say the most difficult challenge in witnessing is starting a conversation about God with a non-Christian. But Wendell Smith, pastor of The City Church in Seattle and author of *From Zero to Eternity in 60 Seconds Flat*, says he discovered that beginning a spiritual discussion can be fun.

Writes Smith: "The Bible tells us to be prepared to give an answer to those who ask about the hope that is in us. [See 1 Pet. 3:15.] We should be ready to make a statement. People around us wear weird clothes, nose rings and tattoos in their attempt to make a statement. Why shouldn't we make our simple statements of faith in turn?

"Other people curse, swear or tell dirty stories in public places. Why shouldn't we talk about the salvation and blessings we have received from our amazing relationship with the Lord Jesus?"

Smith polled a number of prominent Christian leaders to learn how they begin conversations with unbelievers. Here are some of their "one-liners":

- Bill Bright, the late founder of Campus Crusade for Christ: "Who do you think was the greatest person who ever lived? Who has had the most influence on history of any person who has ever lived?"
- Pastor Billy Joe Daugherty: "Are you ready for heaven?"

- Evangelist Luis Palau: “Do you have a relationship with God, or are you still searching?”
 - Bible teacher Marilyn Hickey: “When I prayed this one prayer it changed my life.”
 - Author Cindy Jacobs: “I have a philosophy that everyone was born for a reason. Do you know what you were born for? When you are dying, will you know why you lived?”
- Do you believe that a few words can lead a person to Christ? It can happen!

The story is told of an unbeliever who wanted to see 18th century evangelist George Whitefield preach but did not want to listen to his message. Deliberately putting fingers in both his ears, he watched the great preacher without listening to a word he said.

But a stubborn fly landed on his nose, and no matter what he did, he could not shake him off. He unplugged his ears long enough to shoo the fly away, and in those brief seconds, Whitefield proclaimed loudly, “Him who has ears to hear, let him hear!” The amazing timing of it so intrigued the man that he listened to the rest of Whitefield’s sermon and was saved.

A small window of time is given to all of us to touch the lives of even those who we think may not be listening, but who may open their ears long enough for us to penetrate their souls and enlighten their eyes—just for that one brief, shining moment.

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