

## Four Steps for an Effective Witness

We are now much more likely to meet Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and people who have no faith than ever before. How can we effectively share our faith in a way that shows respect and kindness while also communicating the unique and essential truths of the Bible? Jesus gave only one answer to that question and it is the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). We often say this, but what does it mean? What would it look like in our lives and our churches? We need to study more deeply to see what the Holy Spirit does when He enters our hearts and how that impacts our witness. For example, let's consider how our family, school, work, and neighborhood relationships change as the fruit of the Spirit, spoken of in Galatians 5:23-24, grows in our lives. Let's also consider what our churches would do for the community if we actively sought and received the gifts of the Holy Spirit as seen in the book of Acts, Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4.

An important additional area of the Holy Spirit is what He does to our words when we ask Him to speak through us. Acts 2 shows God sending the Holy Spirit in a way that people of other languages could understand the preaching of the Gospel. Acts goes on to show the boldness and love that the Holy Spirit brought to the disciples' preaching and teaching. Ellen White wrote, "After the descent of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were so filled with love for Him and for those for whom He died, that hearts were melted by the words they spoke and the prayers they offered. They spoke in the power of the Spirit; and under the influence of that power, thousands were converted" (Acts of the Apostles 22).

We must pray earnestly and depend completely on the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 6:18-20). Only the Holy Spirit can make it possible for people of any background to understand and receive truth (1 Corinthians 2:11; 12:3). This is why we are told, "If we have the interest that John Knox had when he pleaded before God for Scotland, we shall have success. He cried, 'Give me Scotland, Lord or I die,' And when we take hold of the work and wrestle with God, saying, 'I must have souls; I will never give up the struggle,' we shall find that God will look upon our efforts with favor" (Evangelism 294).

### 1. Listen and Care

Jesus left heaven to come close to the people He wanted to reach. He was attentive to their needs. In witnessing, we usually talk too soon and too much. Instead, we need to be friendly, asking good questions, and listening with true interest. The Bible records Jesus asking over 100 questions. We can ask people about their families, hobbies, education, career, future plans, health, beliefs, or anything we find that matters to them. When we listen with our hearts, people can tell we value and respect them. What we learn about them helps us know how to really care for and help them.

We may feel we can't witness because we don't know much about a world religion or might say the wrong thing. However, we just need to know the Buddhist or the Muslim in front of us. What does she think about God, life, death, and suffering? What moral values really matter to her and what wrongs in the world make her upset? What struggles is she going through? What does she love to do? Once we know her beliefs, values, needs, and interests, we will know better which specific pieces of God's good news can best help her at the moment. Remember, "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me'" (The Ministry of Healing 143). Here are some questions that can help conversations move deeper:

- What do you most appreciate of the values your parents lived and taught?
- What beliefs and practices are especially important to you in your religion?
- What challenges are you facing in your life right now?

## 2. Affirm Our Similarities

Even though we usually think of our differences, Bible-believing Christians have much in common with people of other religions. When we affirm those similarities we draw our hearts together. This also makes it easier to then discuss differences. Here are some similarities we share:

The Jewish scriptures are the same as what Christians call the Old Testament. Many Jews believe in the Creator God, uphold the Ten Commandments, including the Seventh-day Sabbath, and avoid unclean meats. Muslims focus on the necessity of being totally surrendered to the One True Creator. They highly respect Jesus as a great prophet, born of a virgin and many believe He will come to judge the world. Their scriptures, the Qur'an, points them to study the Law, the Prophets, and the Gospels. They are not supposed to eat pork or drink alcohol. Hindus and Buddhists believe in a judgment for every good and bad deed, word, and motive. Many are vegetarians, valuing life and health. People from various religions strongly believe in spiritual realities that cannot be seen by the eyes. Compassion, self-sacrifice, honesty, and family fidelity are important morals that most people value. We should draw close through these similarities, speak about them, and live them.

In our eagerness to speak about our unique differences, we may fail to recognize the prejudices that many people of other world religions have towards Christianity. They may feel Christianity is less spiritual and less moral than their own religion because they associate Christianity with the aggressive politics, materialistic lifestyles, and immoral movies in the so-called Christian West. If they can see their own values in us and hear us affirm the good things we have in common, they will be more ready to hear the new special truths we share.

This quote brings this point home: "In laboring in a new field, do not think it your duty to say at once to the people, We are Seventh-day Adventists; we believe that the seventh-day is the Sabbath; we believe in the non-immortality of the soul. This would often erect a formidable barrier between you and those you wish to reach. Speak to them, as you have opportunity, upon points of doctrine on which you can agree. Dwell on the necessity of practical godliness. Give them evidence that you are a Christian, desiring peace, and that you love their souls. Let them see that you are conscientious. Thus you will gain their confidence; and there will be time enough for doctrines" (Gospel Workers 119-120).

We can also use what is interesting to them to introduce important spiritual values. "The prince of teachers, He sought access to the people by the pathway of their most familiar associations. He presented the truth in such a way that ever after it was to His hearers intertwined with their most hallowed recollections and sympathies. He taught in a way that made them feel the completeness of His identification with their interests and happiness. His instruction was so direct, His illustrations were so appropriate, His words so sympathetic and cheerful, that His hearers were charmed. The simplicity and earnestness with which He addressed the needy, hallowed every word" (Ministry of Healing 23).

For example, in a Bible study we can start the proverbs or Jesus' teachings, focusing on the morality we hold in common. These phrases illustrate the kinds of words that affirm:

- I love how your culture values being at peace with everyone.
- I also believe there are things we cannot see that are real.
- I too struggle to forgive my enemies.

"Agree with the people on every point where you can consistently do so. Let them see that you love their souls, and want to be in harmony with them so far as possible. If the love of Christ is revealed in all your efforts, you will be able to sow the seed of truth in some hearts; God will water the seed sown, and the truth will spring up and bear fruit to His glory" (Evangelism 140).

### 3. Share Differences through Stories

Most people want to avoid conflict and so they don't want to talk about religious differences. Often we are afraid to speak because we might make a mistake, embarrass ourselves, and turn someone away. However, we must not stay silent about the essential differences between us and other world religions. Those differences are primarily about the essential truths regarding salvation and God's true nature and character. He has a plan to help us be effective in this very area where we struggle to share. Jesus showed us His compelling plan for witnessing when He told the Gadarene, "Go tell them what great things God has done for you." Jesus wants us to share what is unique through our stories.

It does not have to be our full testimony of conversion. We can scatter the seeds of truth briefly and frequently. "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" (Desire of Ages 340).

We can tell our stories of answered prayers or our friends' stories and stories from the Bible. For example, if we want them to understand about a living God, we can tell a story of when we asked for His help and how He answered. If we want them to know Jesus can forgive sins, we can talk about our struggles and the peace we found in the story of the cross. When we want to deal with false understandings about reincarnation, ghosts, and gods, we can tell the amazing story of the Great Controversy, weaving in the important truths and gently exposing the false beliefs. Our stories will be believable to our friends because we have experienced them or are sharing how the Bible stories have impacted our lives.

"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" (Desire of Ages 347).

We should seek to match our friends' difficulties to stories that match. It is very helpful to keep a notebook where we write down stories and Bible counsel in different categories such as: 1) Healing for health problems; 2) Peace in the midst of worries, fears or stress; 3) Overcoming Bad Habits) 4. Help for financial problems; 5) Answers for family and relationship problems; 6) Power over fears and evil spirits; 7) Comfort for grief.

As we share, hearts will be turned to understand and believe in the God we trust. "So it should be now. The people of the world are worshiping false gods. They are to be turned from their false worship, not by hearing denunciation of their idols, but by beholding something better. God's goodness is to be made known. 'Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God.' Isa. 43:12" (Christ's Object Lessons 299).

We should be enthusiastic and sincere. We should pray much and the truths will never be forgotten. Story-telling is much better than the typical debate in which no one is changed and hearts are closed. Let's build our evidences for truth right into the beautiful stories of what God has done for us.

#### 4. Invite to a New Experience

Too often we stop witnessing after one of the steps above. This fails to give our friends opportunities to actually experience God. We must invite them to try something related to what we have been talking about, however small. Little steps will lead to a bigger encounter with Jesus. We should pray always, expecting great miracles from God.

We have been promised, “The secret of our success and power will be found in making direct, personal appeals to those who are interested, having unwavering reliance upon the Most High” (Pamphlet 118 2). Note carefully each part of this quote. Direct and personal means matching our friend’s needs. We prayerfully wait for the right moment when they are interested. We depend completely, without giving up on God. He will answer such appeals with decisions for Him.

Each of the Bible doctrines is full of powerful truths that deeply impact our lives. We have so much to share that will improve how people live. As we hear our friends’ needs, we should look for something that will help them. Then ask something like:

- “May I pray for your troubled teenager?”
- “Try praying to God every night before you go to sleep and see if that brings peace.”
- “You said your wife is ready to divorce you. Each time before you see her, would you read this scripture that helped my marriage?”
- “We’re going to the park this Saturday afternoon to spend time as a family. Would you like to join us and experience a special stress-reliever we call “Sabbath Rest?”

Inviting people to enjoy Sabbath in nature can be very powerful. Ellen White wrote, “The most effective way to teach the heathen who know not God is through His works. In this way, far more readily than by any other method, they can be made to realize the difference between their idols, the works of their own hands, and the true God, the Maker of heaven and earth. . . . In itself the beauty of nature leads the soul away from sin and worldly attractions, and toward purity, peace, and God” (Counsels to Teachers 186). We can teach them lessons about morality from nature, then about the Creator.

If our lives are full of the Holy Spirit and we have a close personal walk with God, just being a good friend will help people experience God. “The teacher of sacred truth can impart only that which he himself knows by experience. ‘The sower sowed his seed.’ Christ taught the truth because He was the truth. His own thought, His character, His life-experience, were embodied in His teaching. So with His servants: those who would teach the word are to make it their own by a personal experience” (Christ’s Object Lessons 43).

And through it all we must never forget that it is only the Holy Spirit that can make our witness effective. “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 (the Holy Spirit); 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” (Acts of the Apostles 31).

We must depend on the Holy Spirit, be daily infilled with Christ, and follow Jesus’ methods of witnessing. We will be effective in witnessing and see lasting fruit.

By Scott Griswold. For more ideas on cross-cultural witnessing visit [ReachtheWorldNextDoor.com](http://ReachtheWorldNextDoor.com)  
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