



A Steward In Witness
Text: Selected Scriptures
Series: The Christian As A Steward, #8
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Introduction.

This morning we conclude our series *The Christian As A Steward*. I have tried to clarify who and what we are to be as God's stewards. The overall Biblical picture is that we are responsible to God to manage all that we are and have for Him, His interests. We have looked specifically at being a steward in giving, community, worship, service, and now today, in *witness*.

We are stewards in witness. God has given all of us, each of us this responsibility. We are going to look at this responsibility, some of the roadblocks, as well as how to get on the road to being a faithful steward in witness.

The Responsibility of Being A Witness.

The responsibility of being a witness is crystal clear in Scripture. We see it in Christ's commands. At the beginning of His public ministry as Jesus called His disciples He said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). He repeated and emphasized this on to the end of His ministry. At the end of Matthew's gospel we read Him saying,

"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (28:18-20).

The same message is given in the opening lines of the book of Acts.

“you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (1:8).

Reaching people with the good news of salvation in Jesus then is an essential part of being a follower of Christ. It is not an optional accessory. The command is given to all believers, not just to those who have the spiritual gift of evangelism. It is clear that God has given Pastor John the gift of evangelism, and He is away now in faithfulness to that enabling and responsibility. But all of us, each of us, are given this responsibility. Indeed, God’s design for the church to grow, for our church to grow, is through each one being a faithful steward in witness to the people all around us who do not know Jesus Christ.

This responsibility is also seen in the apostles’ examples. We can look at the example of the apostles Peter and John in Acts chapter 3 and 4. God used them to heal a man at the gate of the temple who had been born lame. Peter preached a sermon to the people who gathered around. The temple guards grabbed Peter and John, and hauled them before the religious leaders who ordered them to stop talking about Jesus. Peter and John answered, “whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for *we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard*” (Acts 4:19-20). Being a witness was not an *activity* for when they had time or found it convenient, but it was a part of their identity, who they had become. Christ *had* made them *become* fishers of men.

Then there is the example of the apostle Paul. Listen to his words to the church at Corinth,

“For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. For if I do this voluntarily, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have a stewardship entrusted to me” (1 Corinthians 9:16-17).

Here is a picture of one aspect of being a true and devoted follower of Christ by realizing that being a witness is an “*always responsibility*.” When we fulfill it willingly, there is joy and a reward. When we don’t feel like it, it still is a responsibility. The responsibility of being a witness is clear — it is given to all of us for all the times and circumstances of our lives.

The Reality Of Problems In Being An Effective Witness.

Okay, it is our responsibility. But as we set out, even as we think about, we come face to face with some problems in being an effective witness. Let me highlight two major areas this morning. The first problem is not being prepared. The apostle Peter tells us to

“sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defence to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence” (1 Peter 3:15).

Always be ready to give an account of your hope in Jesus Christ, of Jesus and His salvation. In what way are we to be *ready*? How do we measure this readiness? If we look at actually talking to a non-Christian about Jesus as a measurement, it appears that most Christians are not ready. Studies in North America over decades now have consistently shown that over 9 out of 10 Christians never introduce another person to Christ. While we should not confuse *results* with activity, there is a correlation. If we are not ready, how do we become ready? I will talk about that a bit later.

A second problem is fear. Peter, just before the statement we looked at, wrote,

“Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED” (1 Peter 3:13-14).

There are many different fears that can freeze us in our tracks. Consider five common ones:

- The fear of evangelism itself. Talk about it, approach it, package it any way you want, and it still is a high hurdle many don't clear. Recognize this fear, put it in the perspective of God's great grace to you, the need of others, your responsibility.
- The fear of rejection. When we talk with someone about Christ, there is the possibility that even our friends will not understand and not only reject Jesus, but reject us. Rejection hurts.
- The fear of looking like a fanatic, someone who is weird. Yes, there are some well-intended believers who cause more embarrassment than joy, who radiate more heat than light as witnesses. Certainly our popular media tends to portray anyone who is serious about Jesus Christ and the gospel as a fanatic, fringe element weirdo.

- The fear of lack of interest. There are people who do not want to hear about Jesus. But time after time when people present the gospel they are surprised, even shocked, that the person was willing to listen and showed some interest. There are more people than you think who would welcome an open, caring discussion about the big questions of life, including God.
- The fear of Failure. No one likes to fail! It can be embarrassing and discouraging. But failure is part of life and is not always understood correctly. It is not failure to *sow the seed* today without a *harvest* today, to *water* today without a *harvest* today. Every contact and aspect of our witness matters. Investigators have many ways to identify people. Some of the older ways included photographs and fingerprints. Some of the newer ways include DNA fingerprinting, voice fingerprinting, lip fingerprinting, ear fingerprinting. One expert said, “Every contact leaves a trace.” This is also true of your witness, “*Every contact leaves a trace.*”

The Road To Being An Effective Witness.

If we accept our responsibility, our stewardship of being a witness and are willing to face our fears, where do we go from there? How do we get on, stay on the road to being an effective witness. The first step is to recognize two basic realities. First, Christians *are* different from non-Christians. We are different not only in our relationship to God and eternity, but also in our basic identity which is to be reflected in our character and lifestyle. Unfortunately, the difference is not always as clear as it should be. And no, I am not talking about man-made, legalistic standards, but the objective truth, values and character of Christ.

It is easy for us who are here in Canada to put our relationship with God in the isolated compartment of *personal religious faith*, and then to blend in with our culture. It is much more easy to drift downstream with our world rather than to swim upstream against the strong current. There are issues to be dealt with: true, total commitment to Christ and to the process of growth. Just as Christ was misunderstood, rejected and persecuted because of who He was and how He lived, so, to varying degrees, will be each and every true, totally committed follower of Christ.

The second reality is that people want to know why Christians are different. They can see, should see, a difference in your life. What differences? Qualities that Peter wrote about,

the presence of harmony, sympathy, brotherly love, kindheartedness, humbleness, and more (1 Peter 3:8-16). Then there is the fruit of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

They can see these differences, but they don't understand why. We make a serious mistake when we assume people know who Christ is, what the Christian faith is really about. A question asked in one survey, "What do you think it means to be a Christian?" The responses broke down like this:

- 22%, don't know
- 21%, to live differently than other people
- 19%, to have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ
- 14%, to love and help others
- 11%, to go to church, be religious
- 10%, to be a good person.

Only 19% knew what it means to be a Christian. Yes, we make a serious mistake when we assume people know who Christ is, what the Christian faith is really about.

The second step to get and be on the path of being an effective witness is to respond to two basic directions. First, consistently live a good example. We go back to 1 Peter 3.

"Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defence to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ will be put to shame" (13-16).

Consistently live a good example, day in and out, in all areas of life.

The second direction is to be ready to speak. The apostle Peter says, be *ready*, meaning *willing*. If you know the basics of the gospel and what Jesus has done for you, be ready,

willing to tell others. Yes, you will learn more in time, but wherever you are in your spiritual life, be willing here and now.

Be *ready*, meaning *prepared*. *Spiritually prepared*. Verse 15, “sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.” Romans 12:1, “present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice.” Romans 12:2, “do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind ...”

Then be *practically prepared*. This does not mean being able to answer all the fine, detailed questions, but to give an account, a defence, a personal explanation of your hope in Jesus. And, yes, thought and organization can be very important. There are many resources, methods, materials we can find at Christian bookstores to help us. Be as well-prepared as you can for *this* moment. It is sad that some Christians go to great lengths to prepare for their careers, a job interview, to celebrate special occasions, but when it comes to the most important thing on earth—the reality of Jesus Christ and His gift of salvation—they don’t even think of preparing.

Conclusion.

As a child of God you *are* a steward in witness. I understand some of you may think your witness really isn’t that important. *It is!*

In 1858 a Sunday school teacher talked with a young man in the basement stockroom of a shoe store. That young man gave his life to Christ. That young man was Dwight L. Moody. He became an evangelist. In 1879 Moody was invited to England by Frederick B. Meyer. Meyer was greatly touched himself and became a key leader in the revival there. Later, Meyer preached on a U.S. university campus. One of those saved was J. Wilbur Chapman. Chapman was involved with the YMCA, recruited a former baseball player, Billy Sunday, to do evangelistic work. Billy Sunday preached once in Charlotte, North Carolina, encouraged many and, as a result, they brought in another speaker, Mordecai Hamm. In that series of meeting a young man heard the gospel and gave his life to Christ. That man was Billy Graham, who God used to bring the gospel to millions of people

We could continue the story on and on. This *chain* of God’s working began with a Sunday school teacher. An ordinary person like all of us here. God used him to reach others, who reached others, who reached others. In the final analysis, it is not important how well-

known any of them are or become, but think of the wonderful reality of how God uses ordinary people like us!

So, “What can I do? Where do I begin?” Let me suggest that you

- Think of at least two people you know who are not Christians.
- Pray for them every day.
- Make and keep regular contact, including introducing them to other Christians on a regular basis.
- Share the gospel with them before the end of this year.
- Read at least one book on sharing your faith this year.

As you go to some quiet time with God now, begin by reflecting on, evaluating your stewardship of being a witness. Ask God to forgive you for complacency, failure to be prepared and be an effective witness in the sowing, watering and harvesting process of His work. Commit yourself to begin to grow, to continue to grow in faithfulness of being a steward in witness.

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