

Ev221 Sharing Your Spiritual Journey

Lesson Ev221-14 Spiritual Encounters: Focus on the Eternal

In the last lesson you learned about the contrast between darkness and light. They symbolize the reality of spiritual blindness and spiritual insight. Preaching the gospel can bring insight and truth to people without Christ. In this lesson, Paul moves beyond the comparisons of light and darkness. He challenges his audience to think about the difference between focusing on our daily physical challenges and the eternal realities of our place in Christ.

As people grow older their physical bodies begin to wear out. Paul was thinking about the limits—the aches and pains—of his body. He contrasts the condition of his flesh with the glory of God as expressed his Son, Jesus. From this context Paul wrote, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (2Cor 4:16–18). The Scriptures challenge us to keep our focus on the right things – the things of eternal value. This is particularly important when it comes to sharing our faith with others.

Have you ever tried to share your faith with someone who is resistant? They are not really accepting what you are saying. They might even say, “No, I am not interested, go away!” In Luke 10, Jesus commands his disciples to go into the harvest field and preach the gospel. “When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you” (Luke 10:5–6). Think about this for a while. What do you think this means?

It appears that there is a way of knowing whether people are accepting what you have to offer or not. Jesus implies that his disciples will have spiritual insight into people’s hearts, especially when it comes to their receiving the gospel. We call this spiritual discernment.

The same principle is at work in what Paul is saying to the Corinthians. We need to focus not on the things which are seen, but the things which are unseen. What is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. We are not really that good at looking into and understanding the spiritual realm. We are not able to “see” or understand exactly what is happening. That’s why we look to the Scriptures, the Word of God, to understand what is happening in these spiritual encounters. When you try to share your faith with others, you are having a spiritual encounter.

Let me help explain this with an example from door-to-door witnessing. Imagine that you are out visiting a local neighborhood. When you approach a house, you notice that there is a statue of Buddha in the front yard. Your immediate assumption is that this household includes Buddha worshippers. Immediately, the woman who answers the door tells you she is a Buddhist and is not interested in talking with you. She closes the door firmly, dismissing you somewhat rudely. As you leave to go on to the next house, you say to each other, “That Buddhist woman will never come to Christ!”

Yet, beyond your knowing, what truly happens is that when she comes out of the house again, she finds the gospel tract you left in her door. Being somewhat curious, she takes it inside. Because you are praying for her, God is at work in her life. Regardless of what you saw in the

natural, she eventually reads the tract. It explains the gospel simply. She realizes her need of Christ and prays to commit her life to him. Then she buys a Bible and begins to read it. She decides to visit the church whose address is on the back of the tract. The people there are friendly and many of them have been Buddhists at one time too! Over time she is baptized in water and becomes a solid member of that local church. Many testimonies from Christians say they came to Christ by reading a gospel tract. Others came because some Christian told them about Jesus.

My own testimony is similar. A young man came by my brother's house and told me about my need to be born again. I laughed at him and argued with him. I left there and went and got drunk. But before I left, he gave me a small piece of paper with some simple instructions written on it: "Get a Bible, pray, read the Book of John, go to church." In spite of my resistance, I did not throw that piece of paper away.

Many months later, I still had that little homemade tract. After thinking about it a long time, I did go and buy a Bible. I began to pray and to read the Book of John. Within a few months, I asked Jesus to forgive me and I began to live for him. Eventually, I started attending a church that I became very committed to. I was baptized in water there.

The point of these stories is, you may not ever know the impact of your testimony. If the one sharing the gospel had focused on what he saw with his eyes, he could have become discouraged. The Buddhist lady didn't want to listen to the gospel; I went out and got drunk. You probably have had your own experiences in witnessing to others. The times when they just didn't seem open to the gospel, you assumed the most negative outcome.

So, the question for us is, who is the person of peace in our neighborhood? Who will receive and accept the message? Is it the drug addict, the prostitute, the prisoner? Perhaps it is the terminally ill person, the homeless, the orphan? Or maybe it is those who are the most depressed among us. Why do I name such people as the possible person of peace? Because if any of these were to come to Christ and find freedom, their witness would be dramatic. It would impact their entire community. Jesus said, "Whoever has been forgiven little loves little" (Luke 7:47). The opposite is also true. Those who have been forgiven much love much. The gospel shines brightest in those who are coming out of the greatest darkness.

But the Scriptures tell us that we should not focus on the things that are seen, but the things which are unseen. God is working in the lives of people with whom we are sharing the gospel—in ways we cannot see. The things of this world, what we see in the natural, are temporary. The things we can't see—God's divine intervention in people's lives—have eternal results. These things are often beyond our understanding, for God works in mysterious ways.

Why do we consider them mysterious? God explained the answer through the prophet Isaiah: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8-9).

This teaching is **important** because it challenges us to keep our eyes focused on the spiritual and eternal nature of things, especially when witnessing to others about Jesus. We can only judge by the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.

The **main truth** is that we shouldn't get distracted by what we see in the natural. These reactions are temporary. Rather focus on the supernatural—the unseen—which is eternal.

Review Questions

1. Why should we not assume too much about what we see with the natural eye and rather try to focus on what God is doing in the supernatural? [Pause 5 seconds.]

A. If you said, "The things in the natural are temporary and the things that happen in the supernatural are eternal," you are correct.

2. When Jesus sends out his followers to witness, he says they should look for a "person of peace." How will you know who this "person of peace" is in your neighborhood? [Pause]

A. If you said that the "person of peace" is anyone who is open and receptive to the Word of God, you are right.

3. In Luke 10 Jesus tells his disciples to say to house owners, "Peace be with you." Why do you think he told them to do this? [Pause]

A. If you answered, "Based on the answer back to them, his disciples would have spiritual insight or discernment into people's hearts," you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to listen to it a few times, until you can share it in your own words with your family and friends. Memorize the scripture: "We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (Second Corinthians 4:18). How can your understanding of this scripture help you to be a better witness for Jesus? What principles from this teaching would help you in equipping others in your congregation to be better at sharing their faith?

When you think about the concept of the "person of peace" in your neighborhood, can you give some specific examples of people you think might qualify for this role? How would you approach these people with the gospel? Pray for them and see if God will open a door for you to share the gospel with them.