

Ev221 Sharing Your Spiritual Journey

Lesson Ev221-29 Assessing Effective Methods: Spirit-led

One Saturday afternoon a believer was trying to witness to a philosophy professor. The professor tried to convince the Christian of the error of his beliefs and questioned the authority of the Bible. He claimed it was written by humans, not inspired by God. He had decided that modern thinkers like him had no need for faith. The professor became very harsh in his criticism of the church. Suddenly the believer realized that only God could make the difference in convincing this man. So he began to pray silently, “Lord what do I say to this man? I don’t have a clue what to do or say, and he’s not open to any real discussion.”

Within a moment, the Holy Spirit spoke to his heart and said, “Ask him if he has peace.”

The believer thought, “That’s not going to work. Ask him if he has peace? What has that got to do with refuting his arguments?”

But instead of arguing with God, he asked the professor, “Well sir, let me ask you one question before you go. Do you have peace about all this?”

To his surprise, the question startled the man. His jaw dropped open, and he looked at the Christian and said, “You know, I never really thought about that.”

Sensing a new openness in him, the Christian continued, “Well, all those arguments sound good, but the question remains, do they give you a peace in your heart? Are your beliefs something that would bring peace to the hearts of other people as well?” It was clear that the Holy Spirit had struck just the right chord in the man’s soul. He could see the professor soften as he agreed to take a small booklet about finding peace with God.

In this lesson we try to answer the question: “What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the witnessing process?” As always, we appeal to the Scriptures for the answer. They are clear. We must rely on the Holy Spirit to convince people of their sin and their need for Christ. Your past lessons have discussed a lot about witnessing. Becoming a Christian can be defined as a life-long process of being transformed into the image of Christ. God reconciles people back into relationship with himself through the atonement of his Son’s death on the Cross.

Throughout the three stages of conversion: quest, encounter, and ongoing change through discipleship, the Holy Spirit interacts with humans. The personalities of people are all different. This is why we must rely on his leading in all our witnessing efforts.

Nevertheless, the three phases, explained in Lessons 9 to 11, provide a structure to explain how the Holy Spirit works. The first phase involves a spiritual quest upon which humans embark. People ponder their reason for existence. They become aware of emptiness or maybe of sin in their heart. The second phase, encounter, is a sense of the power or presence of the risen Lord. The person accepts Christ and the cleansing power of his blood which restores their relationship with God. Finally, the phase of ongoing spiritual change takes place as the person moves toward a specific destiny—eternal life with God. For this model, each phase builds on the former one. A person cannot move to encounter without quest, nor to discipleship before encounter.

Jesus' description of the work of the Spirit in John chapter 16 shows the three-fold aspect of his work in the world today. It outlines the ministry of the Spirit in the salvation process. Each aspect of the Spirit's work corresponds with one of the phases of the spiritual journey. Jesus said, "When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned (John 16:8-11).

This teaching about the Holy Spirit highlights the conviction of sin, presents Christ's righteousness, and bears witness to God's judgment upon the world. The key images of sin, righteousness, and judgement, when rightly understood, provide a basis for movement from one stage of conversion to another. These movements result from divine interactions between the Spirit of God and people. Witnessing can be seen as understanding and assisting God, who is at work in the world. Jesus' description of the Spirit's work reveals a three-fold process.

This process involves three realizations within the life of a person. The realization of emptiness comes from seeing their sinfulness contrasted with God's holiness. A realization of the righteousness of Christ comes from hearing the story of his life, death, resurrection, and ascension to the Father. And the realization of judgment to come serves as a catalyst for ongoing change, once they have encountered Christ. The restoration of the image of God in persons comes about only by the work of the Spirit.

The challenges of soul winning require no less than Holy Spirit guidance. We need to recognize that what worked in another time or place may not work today in this place. We may find that a person who was receptive the day before is no longer open to the gospel today. They have had time to process and count the cost of what accepting Christ will mean in their life. This highlights the importance of focusing on the Holy Spirit's leading, moment by moment in our approach.

This lesson is **important** because it teaches that trusting in divine guidance is necessary. Believers must be led by the Holy Spirit in their encounters with those outside the faith. The whole body of Christ must be yielded, sensitive, and flexible when it comes to planning and organizing outreach to their community.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that God is the evangelist, the Holy Spirit is the agent, and humans are the means he uses. All are needed to conduct the divine conversations discussed in the previous lesson. We must remember it is not the method that is sacred, it is the message. That message will be effective if the Holy Spirit bears witness with their spirits of the truth of the gospel and their need for Christ.

Review Questions

1. How does the writer of this lesson define becoming a Christian? [Pause 5 seconds].
 - A. If you answered, "Becoming a Christian can be defined as being reconciled to God through the atonement of his Son's death on the Cross and beginning a life-long process of being transformed into the image of Christ," you are correct.
2. According to the lesson, which passage of Scripture speaks of the Holy Spirit's work and what are the three aspects of his ministry? [Pause]

A. If you said, “The passage is John 16:8-11, and three aspects of the work of the Spirit are convicting the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment,” you would be correct.

3. What is the central truth of the teaching of this lesson? [Pause]

A. If you answered, “We must rely on the Holy Spirit’s leading in all our witnessing efforts,” you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to think about some of your past witnessing experiences. Reflect on how the Holy Spirit was or was not at work in those efforts. What could you do differently in the future to make sure that you honor the Spirit’s leading in your witnessing efforts? How can you teach this to others in your community of faith?