

Ev221 Sharing Your Spiritual Journey

Lesson Ev221-6 Your Salvation Experience and Evangelism

Salvation experiences are as varied as the individuals involved. Remember when you first came to Christ? It may have been because of some sort of crisis in your life. Or perhaps it was more of a gradual process. Was it the result of someone sharing the gospel with you, or was it at a gathering of believers?

How about sharing your spiritual journey? What have your past efforts in evangelism been like? Were you frightened or joyful? Did your involvement make you so excited you couldn't wait to do it again? Or was it so negative that you avoided doing evangelism from then on? It's likely that you have had both positive and negative experiences in witnessing.

Your beliefs about accepting Christ directly impact how you will practice evangelism. Every believer needs to have a good understanding of salvation to be more effective in personal outreach. The next six lessons will deal with this process in more detail.

Remember the stories in the Bible about Peter? He and his brother Andrew were introduced to Christ by John the Baptist. Then Jesus called him at the seashore (Mark 1:17). He and the rest of the Twelve had ups and downs as they heard Jesus' teaching and observed his life. After more than three years with him, Peter still did not want his feet washed. He slept instead of praying in Gethsemane and denied Christ on the night he was betrayed. Even after the resurrection, Peter went back to fishing. It seems that the process of his conversion may have been gradual. We see that he was among the 120 who were filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. After that he no longer denied Christ, but began to preach boldly and to do miracles in Jesus' name.

One author asked 800 people about their salvation experience. He found that the majority of people answering the survey had come to the Lord through a gradual process. So we need to reconsider the expectations of our methods of evangelism. Do we expect a crisis decision or a more gradual process? Many methods of evangelism involve asking people to make sudden decisions to follow Jesus. Yet if most Christians come to Jesus through a gradual process, no wonder people don't want to do such witnessing. It doesn't make sense to them, based on their own experience.

One thing is clear: experiences of accepting Christ are varied. So the challenge is not to limit our views of salvation to our own experience or any one other pattern. Peter's experience may have been gradual. However, he confronted the leaders in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost and called them to repent of their sins. Three thousand were saved and baptized that day.

We need to accept the variety of human experiences of salvation, relying on the Holy Spirit to guide us. You don't need education in evangelism as much as you need experience in hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit. He will help you lead people on their spiritual journey, by sharing your journey with them. Jesus sent people out two by two, specifically to witness to strangers. That's intentional evangelism. He sent the man delivered from demons back to his

own neighbors and family. He was to share with them his testimony of healing and restoration through Jesus. That's testimony evangelism, signs and wonders evangelism—and both combined with relational contacts. Sometimes witnessing may be as simple as sitting down with someone and beginning to answer their questions. Jesus did this in his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well.

Another major challenge for many in evangelism is lack of past involvement in personal outreach. Many people have made no efforts at all. Perhaps the Holy Spirit has begun to convict you of your lack of reaching the lost. As you think about this lack of soul winning in your life, what might be the cause? Lack of preparation? Negative experiences in the past? Fear of what people might think of you? Scripture says we have a responsibility to reach others. It was a priority for Jesus and part of his final command to “go into all the world and make disciples” (Matt 28:18).

For many, a negative experience in the past has kept them from further involvement. By talking about it and realizing that everyone has both good and bad experiences, you can find healing. In prayer you may see that the Holy Spirit can use you in ways you have not considered before. Much of the negative emotion regarding outreach is the result of fear rooted in ignorance. Many people are not sure what others are going to say. They are not sure what they would say if God gave them the opportunity. Discussing outreach efforts openly with others helps to heal the experiences of the past. Together you can ask forgiveness from God for excusing yourselves from witnessing, due to past failures. Peter wept tears of repentance after his betrayal. Later he accepted Jesus' forgiveness and instructions to take care of his sheep.

Finally, remember that witnessing may be an uncomfortable task. The reason is that Satan will do everything he can to make you afraid to speak about Jesus. The very name of Jesus carries so much power for positive change. When you step out in faith and share the truth of God's love for humanity, such fear quickly fades. “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2Tim 1:7, KJV).

One of the things that will help us is to match our spiritual gifts with our soul winning efforts. Methods need to be matched with people's personality, past experiences, and gifts. We should ask some of the following questions: What kind of evangelism brings you the most personal fulfillment? Do others in the body of Christ recognize your gifting and encourage you in this ministry? What witnessing activities seem easiest for you and thus you find yourself doing these more readily than others? Are there aspects of evangelism where you have seen a degree of success?

As a leader, you should discuss with others how their beliefs about salvation might impact their approach to evangelism. Consider which witnessing methods are most used within your context. Do they correspond to the salvation experiences of the people involved in them? If not, how can the methods be adjusted to be more appropriate?

This lesson is **important** because it teaches that each person needs to consider how their own salvation experience influences the methods they use for soul winning. We each need to ask forgiveness for our lack of witnessing efforts and seek deliverance from our fears. As we seek God for opportunities, he will lead us into divine appointments to share our spiritual journey with others. He will do this in ways that just fit our individual gifts.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that there is a direct link between one's own salvation experience and the methods of witnessing that the person is most comfortable with. The Holy Spirit enables us to be witnesses and to overcome our weaknesses as we share Christ with others.

Review Questions

1. What is the connection between how we came to Christ and our efforts in evangelism? [Pause 5 seconds.]
 - A. If you said, "Evangelism methods that reflect our own salvation experience are the ones we are most likely to get involved in," you are correct.
2. Why will evangelism probably never be something easy for Christians? [Pause]
 - A. If you answered, "Because our adversary, Satan, will do everything he can to stop us from telling others about the power in the name of Jesus," you answered correctly.
3. Why is it important to discuss your history of witnessing with others? [Pause]
 - A. If you said, "Discussing our past efforts may help us to overcome fear based on lack of understanding or negative experiences," you are right.

Your **assignment** is to think about the methods of witnessing mentioned in this lesson. Ask yourself the following questions: "Has my salvation experience affected my evangelism efforts? What kinds of soul winning bring me the most fulfillment? How does God want me to strengthen my witnessing?" Discuss the same questions with a few of your fellow workers. Share your successes and failures in evangelism efforts in the past. Then pray for one another as you determine to renew your efforts to share your spiritual journey with others.

Memorize Paul's words to young Timothy: "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (Second Timothy 1:7).