

Spirit-Empowered Witnessing



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 15:26, 27; Acts 2:41, 42; Acts 8:4; Heb. 4:12; Acts 17:33, 34; Acts 18:8.*

Memory Text: “And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness” (*Acts 4:31, NKJV*).

When Jesus commanded the early believers to “ ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel,’ ” it must have seemed like an impossible mission (*Mark 16:15, NKJV*). How could they ever accomplish such a huge challenge? Their numbers were so small. Their resources were limited. They were a largely uneducated band of ordinary believers. But they had an extraordinary God who would empower them for their extraordinary mission.

But Jesus declared, “ ‘You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth’ ” (*Acts 1:8, NKJV*). The empowering of the Holy Spirit would enable the believers to share the message of the Cross with life-changing, world-changing power. The Holy Spirit made their witness effective. In a few short decades, the gospel impacted the entire world. Acts declares that these early believers “turned the world upside down” (*Acts 17:6, NKJV*). The apostle Paul adds that the gospel was “preached to every creature under heaven” (*Col. 1:23, NKJV*). In this week's lesson, we will especially focus on the role of the Holy Spirit in empowering our witness for Christ.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 1.

Jesus and the Promise of the Holy Spirit

With the promise of the Holy Spirit, Jesus met the disciples' concern about His leaving them and returning to heaven. " 'It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you' " (*John 16:7, NKJV*). The Greek word for "helper" is *parakletos*. It refers to "one who comes alongside of" for the purpose of helping. One of the prime functions of the Holy Spirit is to come alongside of all believers to empower and to guide them in their witnessing activities. When we witness for Jesus, we are not alone. The Holy Spirit is beside us to guide us to those honest-hearted seekers. He prepares their hearts before we ever meet them. He guides our words, brings conviction to the seekers' minds, and strengthens them to respond to His promptings.

Read John 15:26, 27 and John 16:8. What do these verses tell us about the Holy Spirit's role in witnessing?

The Holy Spirit testifies, or witnesses, of Jesus. His ultimate goal is to lead as many people to Jesus as possible. His mission is to glorify Jesus. In this role, He convicts all believers of their responsibility to witness. He opens our eyes to see the possibilities in people all around us and works behind the scenes to create a receptivity to the gospel message.

The Gospel of John states it clearly. He " 'will convict the world of sin' " (*John 16:8, NKJV*). In other words, He moves upon hearts to bring a deepening sense of alienation from God and the need of repentance. He also convicts the world "of righteousness." Not only does the Holy Spirit reveal sin, but He also instructs us in righteousness. He reveals the magnificence of Jesus' righteousness in contrast to our own filthiness. The Holy Spirit's role is not merely to point out how bad we are; it is to reveal how good, how kind, how compassionate, and how loving Jesus is and to mold us into His image.

Witnessing is simply cooperating with the Holy Spirit to glorify Jesus. In the Spirit's power and under His guidance, we testify of this amazing Christ who has transformed our lives.

In our desire to work for souls, why must we always remember that only the Holy Spirit, not us, can do the converting?

An Empowered Church

The book of Acts rightly has been called “The Acts of the Holy Spirit.” It is an exciting adventure in witnessing, evangelistic proclamation, and church growth. Acts is the story of consecrated believers, filled with the Holy Spirit, impacting the world for Christ. They were totally dependent on the Holy Spirit to accomplish miraculous results. There is an example of what the Holy Spirit can accomplish through men and women who are totally consecrated to Him.

Read Acts 2:41, 42; Acts 4:4, 31; Acts 5:14, 42; Acts 6:7; and Acts 16:5. **What impresses you most about these passages? What is the message that Luke, the author of Acts, desires to share by recording such rapid growth?**

Luke’s intent in writing the book of Acts is to share with each reader the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the early church.

Notice, too, that he is not hesitant to use numbers to measure the movement of the Spirit in the first century. That is, he was counting baptisms. In Acts 2:41, he highlights the fact that 3,000 were baptized in a single day at a single place. In Acts 4:4, he speaks of 5,000 men who were baptized. In Acts 5:14, multitudes come to the Lord and are baptized.

Whether it is a single individual such as Lydia, the Philippian jailer, a demon-possessed slave girl, or the Ethiopian eunuch, Luke takes notice and records the moving of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of these people. The important point here is that behind each of the large numbers are individual human beings, each one a child of God for whom Jesus Christ died. Yes, we like the big numbers, but in the end, witnessing is often a one-to-one endeavor.

To facilitate the rapid growth of the New Testament church, new churches were planted. One of the reasons that the early church grew so rapidly is because the church was constantly renewed through planting new churches. What an important message for us today.

The prime focus of the New Testament church was mission. How can we make sure that at the core of all that we do in our local church, mission is always at the center?

The Holy Spirit and Witnessing

Throughout the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit was powerfully present. He ministered to and through the believers as they witnessed for their Lord in a variety of ways. He strengthened them to face the trials and challenges of witnessing in a hostile culture. He led them to honest-hearted truth seekers. He prepared the hearts of people in whole cities before the believers ever came to those cities. He opened doors of opportunity that they never dreamed of and empowered their words and actions.

Read Acts 7:55; Acts 8:29; Acts 11:15; Acts 15:28, 29; and Acts 16:6–10. How did the Holy Spirit minister to the witnessing disciples in each of the experiences listed in these Bible verses? In other words, what were some of the various things the Holy Spirit did in these situations?

The Holy Spirit's varied ministry in the first century was truly amazing. The experiences above are just a sampling of His activity. He strengthened Stephen to witness for his Lord in the face of a ruthless and out-of-control mob stoning him to death. He miraculously guided Philip to an influential, truth-seeking Ethiopian to open up the continent of Africa for the gospel. He gave Peter a confirmatory sign when the Gentile believers also received the gift of the Holy Spirit. He brought the church together in unity at a time when it could easily have split over the issue of circumcision, and He opened up the entire continent of Europe to the preaching of the gospel through the apostle Paul. The Holy Spirit was active in the New Testament church and is active in the life of the church today. He longs to empower us, strengthen us, teach us, guide us, unify us, and send us out on the most important mission in the world, which is leading men and women to Jesus and His truth. The point we have to remember is that He is still active and working today, just as He was in the time of the apostles and the early church.

What can we do, day by day, to make ourselves more open and amenable to the power of the Holy Spirit in our own lives? What are the right kinds of choices that will enable Him to work in and through us?

The Holy Spirit, the Word, and Witnessing

The Word of God was at the very heart of the witness of the New Testament church. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost drew largely from the Old Testament to prove that Christ was the Messiah. Stephen's dying testimony reviewed Israel's history in the Old Testament. Peter referred to the "word which God sent to the children of Israel" (*Acts 10:36, NKJV*) and then shared the Resurrection story with Cornelius. The apostle Paul referred again and again to the great Old Testament predictions regarding the coming of the Messiah, and Philip carefully explained to a seeking Ethiopian the significance of the Messianic prediction in Isaiah 53. In each instance, the disciples proclaimed God's Word, not their own. The Spirit-inspired Word was the basis of their authority.

Read Acts 4:4, 31; Acts 8:4; Acts 13:48, 49; Acts 17:2; and Acts 18:24, 25. What do these passages teach us about the relationship between the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and the witness of the New Testament church?

The same Holy Spirit who inspired the Word of God works through the Word to change lives. There is life-giving power in the Word of God because, through the Spirit, it is Christ's living Word.

Read 2 Peter 1:21 and Hebrews 4:12. Why is the Word of God so powerful in changing lives?

"The creative energy that called the worlds into existence is in the word of God. This word imparts power; it begets life. Every command is a promise; accepted by the will, received into the soul, it brings with it the life of the Infinite One. It transforms the nature and re-creates the soul in the image of God."—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 126.

The reason the Bible has such power to transform lives is because the same Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible in the first place inspires and changes us as we read it. As we share God's Word with others, the Holy Spirit works to change their lives through the Word He inspired. God has promised to bless His Word, not our words. The power is in the Word of God, not human speculation.

The Life-Transforming Power of the Holy Spirit

A careful study of the book of Acts reveals God, through His Spirit, working miracles in human lives. Acts is a case study on the gospel's triumphing over cultural biases, transforming lifelong, deeply ingrained habits, and teaching all humanity Christ's grace and truth. The Holy Spirit meets people where they are, but He does not leave them there. In His presence, they are changed. Their lives are transformed.

Read Acts 16:11–15, 23–34; Acts 17:33, 34; and Acts 18:8. These are just a few of the conversion stories in the Bible. What do the various accounts teach us about the power of God to change the lives of all sorts of people from various backgrounds?

What an amazing variety of people. Lydia was a prosperous Jewish businesswoman, and the Philippian jailer was a middle-class Roman civil servant. The Holy Spirit can reach all spectrums of society. His power to transform reaches both men and women, rich and poor, educated and uneducated.

The last two characters on our list are equally as remarkable. Acts 17:34 refers to the conversion of Dionysius the Areopagite. In Bible times, the Athenian Areopagites were part of the legal counsel of judges who tried court cases. They were prominent, well-respected members of Greek society.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the ministry of the apostle Paul reached even the upper echelon of society. Crispus (*Acts 18:8*) was a ruler of the Jewish synagogue. He was a religious leader steeped in Jewish Old Testament thought, and the Holy Spirit broke through and changed his life. These case histories reveal that as we witness for Christ and share His Word with others, the Holy Spirit will do remarkable things in the lives of all sorts of people from all sorts of backgrounds, cultures, education, and beliefs. We cannot and must not make assumptions about who can or cannot be reached. Our job is to witness to anyone and everyone brought into our lives. The Lord will do the rest.

Christ's death was universal; that is, it was for every human being, ever. What should this crucial truth teach us about how we should never assume that anyone is beyond the hope of salvation?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “The Gift of the Spirit,” pp. 47–56, in *The Acts of the Apostles*; “‘Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled,’” pp. 667–672, in *The Desire of Ages*.

The Holy Spirit cooperates with the Father and the Son in the redemptive process. In all of our witnessing activities, we are joining Him in His work of saving people. He convicts hearts. He opens doors of opportunity. Through His Word, He enlightens minds and reveals truth. He breaks the bonds of prejudice that enslave us, triumphs over cultural biases that obscure our vision of truth, and delivers us from the chains of evil habits that shackle us.

As we witness for Jesus, it is crucial to remember that we are cooperating with the Holy Spirit. He is there before us, preparing hearts to receive the message of the gospel. He is there with us, moving upon minds as we perform an act of random kindness, share our testimony, conduct a Bible study, give away a piece of truth-filled literature, or participate in an evangelistic outreach. He will continue working upon the heart of the individual long after we leave, doing whatever it takes to lead that person to a knowledge of salvation.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Share with the members of your Sabbath School group a time when you sensed the Holy Spirit’s working powerfully through your witness.
- 2 Have you ever felt apprehensive or fearful about sharing your faith? How does a knowledge of the ministry of the Holy Spirit reduce that fear and give you assurance as you witness?
- 3 In this week’s lesson, we talked about the “activity” of the Holy Spirit in our witnessing. Discuss some different ways the Holy Spirit works with us in our witnessing endeavors. How does the Holy Spirit equip us to witness and work in the lives of others as we witness?
- 4 The lesson talked about the centrality of the Bible in witnessing. Why is the Bible such a crucial component of our faith and witness? How can we avoid the traps of those who, even while claiming to believe in the Bible, subtly diminish its authority and witness?