

Witness *and* Service: The Fruit of Revival



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 28:19, 20; John 20:21; Acts 2; Acts 22:1–14; John 6:1–11; Acts 8:26–38.*

Memory Text: “‘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 purpose of revival is to fill our hearts with such a love for Jesus that we long to share this love with every person possible. In genuine revival, our own hearts are awakened to God's goodness, compassion, forgiveness, and power. We are so charmed by His love and transformed by His grace that we cannot be silent.

In contrast, a “revival” that focuses on one's “spiritual experience alone” misses the mark. If it develops attitudes critical of others who do not measure up to one's “standard of holiness,” it is certainly not heaven inspired. If the emphasis of revival is to merely change external behavior rather than to change hearts, then something is wrong.

Changed hearts lead to changed behavior. Genuine revival never leads to self-centeredness or, especially, to self-sufficiency or self-exaltation. Instead, it always leads to a selfless concern for others. When our hearts are renewed by God's grace, we long to bless and serve those who are in need. All genuine revival leads to a renewed emphasis on mission and service.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 27.*

Christ’s Parting Commission and Promise

Christ did not establish His church in order for it to simply care for itself. Jesus’ parting words focused upon the church’s mission. Christ’s intention is for His church to look beyond itself. He established it to share the light of His love and the message of His salvation with the world.

Read and summarize the following texts. How does each passage reveal the desire of Jesus’ heart for His church?

Matt. 28:19, 20 _____

Mark 16:15 _____

Luke 24:45–49 _____

John 20:21 _____

Once Christ ascended to heaven, His church was to be a visible manifestation of His love and grace to the world. The disciples had a mission. They had a message to share. They had a task to complete. They were to carry on the work that He had begun.

“The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God’s plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to ‘the principalities and powers in heavenly places,’ the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9.

The burden of Jesus’ heart is the salvation of the human race. The apostle Paul wrote to his young friend Timothy that it is the Savior’s desire that “all . . . be saved and . . . come to the knowledge of the truth” (*1 Tim. 2:4, NKJV*). The apostle Peter adds that the Lord is “longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (*2 Pet. 3:9, NKJV*).

What in your life shows your interest in outreach to others? Or does anything show it? What does your answer tell you about yourself and your priorities?

Receiving the Promise

The mission of sharing His love and truth with the entire world must have seemed overwhelming to this small group of disciples. The challenge was enormous, the task immense. Its accomplishment in their lifetime might certainly have seemed impossible (as it can in ours). The best estimates are that the population of the Roman Empire in the first century was approximately sixty to seventy million. According to the first chapter of Acts, 120 believers met in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost. This is a ratio of 1 Christian to approximately every 500,000 to 580,000 people in the empire. From a human standpoint, Jesus' command to preach the gospel to the world seemed unthinkable.

Read Acts 2. What were the results of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the mission of the early church?

The results were astounding. The Christian church exploded in growth. Tens of thousands were converted. The message of Jesus' love was carried to the remotest parts of the empire.

Pliny the Younger, governor of the Roman province of Bithynia on the northern coast of modern Turkey, wrote to Emperor Trajan around A.D. 110. Pliny described the official trials he was conducting to find and execute Christians. "Many of every age, of every social class, even of both sexes, are being called to trial and will be called. Not cities alone but villages in even rural areas have been invaded by the infection of this superstition" (Christianity).

This quote is remarkable. It reveals that in a few generations Christianity had invaded nearly every level of society, even in the remote provinces.

Ninety years later, around A.D. 200, Tertullian, a Roman lawyer turned Christian, wrote a defiant letter to the Roman magistrates defending Christianity. He boasted that "nearly all the citizens of all the cities are Christians."

The story of the book of Acts is the story of a revived church committed to witness for its Lord. Spiritual revival always leads to passionate witness. Sharing is the natural outgrowth of a transformed life. Jesus said to His disciples, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men" (*Matt. 4:19*). The closer we follow Jesus, the more we care about what He cares about. If we have little interest in sharing His love with others, it may be because we are following Him at a distance and need a personal spiritual revival.

The Power of Personal Testimony

Religious ritual has little power to change lives. Religious formalism leaves people spiritually barren. Doctrine alone will not transform hearts. The power of New Testament witnessing was rooted in the genuineness of lives changed by the gospel. The disciples were not play-acting. They were not going through the motions. Theirs was not some form of artificial spirituality. An encounter with the living Christ had changed them, and they could not be silent any longer.

What common thread runs through the experiences of Paul and John that made them such powerful witnesses? *Acts 22:1–14, Phil. 3:1–7, 1 John 1:1–4.*

At Pentecost, the disciples were changed people. Something happened to them so that the Spirit could do something through them. The Holy Spirit had done something for them so that He could do something with them. The Spirit overflowed from their lives to refresh the lives of others.

Jesus put it this way: “ ‘He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’ ” (*John 7:38, NKJV*). The root word for “believes” in the Greek here is *pistis*. It means much more than a superficial belief or mere intellectual assent. It is a rock-solid belief or confident trust. It is a dynamic, life-transforming faith in Christ, who poured out His life on the cross for the sins of humanity. Jesus’ point is that when His love quenches our spiritual thirst, this love flows from our hearts to the people around us.

“Our confession of His faithfulness is Heaven’s chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. We are to acknowledge His grace as made known through the holy men of old; but that which will be most effectual is the testimony of our own experience. We are witnesses for God as we reveal in ourselves the working of a power that is divine.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 347.

The most powerful witness is one of a Christian who knows Jesus personally. There is no substitute for the testimony that springs naturally from a heart immersed in Jesus’ love.

What kind of personal testimony do you have that tells of what the Lord has done for you? How can you learn to share it better with others?

A Witnessing Faith Is a Growing Faith

Activity is a law of life. In order to be healthy, our bodies need consistent exercise. Every organ, muscle, and tissue is strengthened and invigorated through exercise. When we neglect exercise, our immune system is compromised, and we become more susceptible to disease.

Something similar happens to us spiritually when we do not exercise our faith through witnessing. The words of Jesus, that “ ‘it is more blessed to give than to receive’ ” (Acts 20:35), work themselves out in our own spiritual lives. When we share God’s Word with others, we grow spiritually. The more we love Jesus, the more we will desire to witness of His love. The more we witness of His love, the more we will love Him. Sharing our faith strengthens our faith.

What does Jesus’ miracle of multiplying the loaves and fishes teach us about the sharing of our faith? *John 6:1–11.*

The more that we give away our faith, the more our faith multiplies. This law of multiplication is a divine principle of spiritual life. Give and grow, or withhold and wither. Jesus increases our faith as we share it with others, even if our faith is quite small. As we share the Bread of Life with spiritually hungry people around us, Jesus multiplies in our hands, and we end up with more than we started.

When Jesus began, He had five loaves and two fish. After five thousand people were completely satisfied with their meal that day, Jesus had more left over than when He started. There were still twelve baskets remaining.

Jesus’ instructions to His New Testament church are too clear to be misunderstood. He declared, “ ‘Freely you have received, freely give’ ” (Matt. 10:8, NKJV). Witnessing is the gentle breeze that fans the sparks of revival into Pentecostal flames. When witness and service do not accompany a revival of prayer and Bible study, the flames of revival are extinguished, and the embers soon grow cold.

It’s true, isn’t it? The more that we witness, the more our faith grows. What has been your own experience with this crucial spiritual truth?

Revival, Witnessing, and Divine Intervention

The thrilling story of the rapid growth of New Testament Christianity in Acts is the story of a revived church witnessing of Jesus’ love. It is the story of a church that regularly experienced divine intervention. Witnessing was a way of life for these early believers.

“Daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (*Acts 5:42, NKJV*). Persecution even furthered the cause of the gospel. When persecution scattered the members of the church at Jerusalem, they “went everywhere preaching the word” (*Acts 8:4, NKJV*).

One of the more remarkable examples of divine intervention in Acts is the story of Philip and an Ethiopian government official.

Read the story of Philip instructing the Ethiopian and his response in Acts 8:26–38. What can we take from this story about revival and witnessing?

“An angel guided Philip to the one who was seeking for light and who was ready to receive the gospel, and today angels will guide the footsteps of those workers who will allow the Holy Spirit to sanctify their tongues and refine and ennoble their hearts. The angel sent to Philip could himself have done the work for the Ethiopian, but this is not God’s way of working. It is His plan that men are to work for their fellow men.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 109.

There are three essential elements in revival, and they are prayer, the study of God’s Word, and witnessing. When God’s people seek Him in earnest, heartfelt intercession, and when they saturate their minds with the truths of His Word, and when they passionately witness of His love and truth to others—God divinely intervenes and opens unusual doors for the proclamation of truth.

Be honest with yourself: what do you do when witnessing opportunities come? Do you witness, or do you find some excuse not to? What does your answer tell you about your own need of revival and reformation?

Further Study: “In His wisdom the Lord brings those who are seeking for truth into touch with fellow beings who know the truth. It is the plan of Heaven that those who have received light shall impart it to those in darkness. Humanity, drawing its efficiency from the great Source of wisdom, is made the instrumentality, the working agency, through which the gospel exercises its transforming power on mind and heart.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 134.

“God could have reached His object in saving sinners without our aid; but in order for us to develop a character like Christ’s, we must share in His work. In order to enter into His joy,—the joy of seeing souls redeemed by His sacrifice,—we must participate in His labors for their redemption.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 142.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What is the main idea of this week’s lesson? Are there changes that God is calling you to make in your life? Do your priorities need to be readjusted in any way? What actions might God be calling you to take?
- ❷ Dwell more on this amazing spiritual truth that the more we witness for our faith, the more our faith grows. Why do you think this is true? Why does this principle make so much sense?
- ❸ How often do you witness for your Jesus? If not a lot, ask yourself, Why not? Are you afraid of rejection? If so, think about Jesus and how often He was rejected. If rejection didn’t deter Him, it shouldn’t us. Or do you fail to witness because you are not sure of what to say? If so, what does that tell you about your need for a deeper walk with the Lord?
- ❹ During the week we talked a bit about how religious ritual alone cannot bring about a change of the heart. That is so true. At the same time, what is the place of ritual and tradition in our faith and church? In what ways, if any, can ritual and tradition be of value in revival and reformation?
- ❺ Why do we get so much satisfaction from being used by God to reach souls for Him?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Matthew 28:19, 20*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Analyze the relationship between knowing Christ personally and sharing Christ passionately. The purpose of this lesson is to reveal that the fruit of knowing Christ is sharing Christ. Healthy Christians pray, study, and witness. Without witness, prayer and Bible study can easily degenerate into empty formalism or pharisaic ritual.

Feel: Nurture the natural desire to witness, which overflows from a converted heart.

Do: Resolve to take advantage of the witnessing opportunities that Christ provides daily, and decide to set aside time each week for unselfish service and outreach for Christ.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Understanding Christ's Final Words

A Why are Christ's parting words to His disciples in Matthew 28:18–28 so vitally important for the church today?

B What two aspects of the disciples' witness make it so powerfully effective?

II. Feel: Experiencing the Impact of the Holy Spirit's Power

A How would you feel if you were part of a very small group of New Testament believers whose Master had just ascended to heaven, leaving you with the daunting task of reaching the world with the message of His love?

B What gave these disciples such confidence? What gives us confidence that the task can be completed in our day?

C What role do the Holy Spirit and angels play in soul winning? What role do we play?

III. Do: Carrying Out Christ's Mission

A What does the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20 mean to you personally?

B In what practical ways have you attempted to share Jesus' love with others?

► **Summary:** Witnessing and living an unselfish life of blessing to others is the fruit of an intimate experience with Jesus.

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1**—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *Matthew 28:18–20*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: Authentic, New Testament Christianity always manifests itself in lives of witness and service. When we know Christ, we long to share Christ. Revival is accompanied by a burst of witnessing activity. This was true in the book of Acts, and it is true in the church today.

Just for Teachers: The focus of this week’s lesson is that all genuine revival must manifest itself in witness. Witness is not only the outgrowth of revival; it is also at the heart of why revival happens. Help your class to understand that the more we are actively involved in Christ’s service, the more we will draw closer to Him.

Opening Activity: If possible, print out enough copies of the following statement from *Steps to Christ*, page 80, to distribute among the members of your class. Read the statement together, then answer the questions below.

“If you will go to work as Christ designs that His disciples shall, and win souls for Him, you will feel the need of a deeper experience and a greater knowledge in divine things, and will hunger and thirst after righteousness. You will plead with God, and your faith will be strengthened, and your soul will drink deeper drafts at the well of salvation. Encountering opposition and trials will drive you to the Bible and prayer. You will grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ, and will develop a rich experience.”—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 80.

- 1 What does this Ellen G. White statement tell us about the relationship between our own spiritual lives and sharing our faith?
- 2 In what ways does witnessing contribute to our spiritual growth?

► **STEP 2**—Explore

Just for Teachers: Emphasize the importance of a person’s final words. *Matthew 28:18–20* is Christ’s parting commission to His disciples. Ask your class members if they have ever received a letter or an e-mail from someone who knew he or she was dying. Possibly someone in your class remembers a child’s final night at home just before he or she went off to college or was married. Maybe someone

can recall an experience with an adult child who was going overseas on a military assignment. What were these moments like?

Bible Commentary

I. Christ's Final Words (Review Matthew 28:18–20 with your class.)

Our passage begins with the promise of power. Jesus says, “ ‘All authority [power] has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore . . . ’ ” (NKJV). The word *authority* is *exousia* in the Greek. It is the same power that Jesus freely exercised over the forces of evil throughout His ministry. It is upon the basis of Christ's authority and through Christ's power that His disciples are sent out. The Great Commission is accompanied by a great promise. The disciples do not go in their strength; they go in His.

The commission “Go” includes each believer. Our Lord does not call the qualified. He calls all believers and qualifies them. The priority is to make disciples of all nations. Christianity was the first truly international religion. Jesus' words eliminate national boundaries. Christ's followers are members of His church, comprising people from “every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (Rev. 14:6, NKJV). Their mission is to reach the world with the message of Jesus and His truth. For those who commit their lives to Him, He promises His presence. He declares, “ ‘I am with you always, even to the end of the age’ ” (Matt. 28:20, NKJV). Although Christ was no longer physically present with His disciples, He was closer to them through the ministry of His Holy Spirit than if He had never left. The promise of His presence will sustain His witnessing church until the day He returns.

Consider This: When we share God's Word with others, we are doing so with the authority of Jesus Christ. We are participating with Him in His mission to a lost world. How does this make you feel?

II. Christ's Promise of Power (Review Acts 1:8; 2:38, 39 with your class.)

The word for “power” in Acts 1:8 is *dunamis*, the word from which our English word *dynamite* is derived. This is the power of the Holy Spirit that comes upon those who surrender their lives to Jesus, as Acts 2:38, 39 promises. It is the power to overcome the forces of hell and proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth. The gift of the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential in receiving power to witness. The Acts revival came as the disciples committed their lives to reaching the world with the gospel. When Christ's church obeys His command to proclaim the good news of His grace to the world, His Spirit will fall with Pentecostal power so that they are strengthened and can accomplish the task He has assigned them.

According to Acts 2, the promise of the Holy Spirit was not only for the New Testament church; it was for His people until the end of time. In his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Peter assures the newly baptized converts that “‘the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call’” (*Acts 2:39, NKJV*). The promise of the Holy Spirit is for every generation of believers. It is especially needed by His last-day church to finish the work of God on earth. Without the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the task of proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth is impossible. But through the power of Jesus, manifest in His Spirit, the impossible becomes possible (*Matt. 19:26*). Our greatest need as a people is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; but God will not pour out His Holy Spirit for a witness to a church that has little interest in witnessing.

Consider This: Just before Jesus ascended to heaven, He promised to send heaven’s richest gift to His earthly church—the gift of the Holy Spirit. When we witness for Jesus, we witness in His authority and in the Holy Spirit’s power. Why, then, are we so powerless in our witness at times?

III. Christ’s Divine Encounters (*Review Acts 8–10 with your class.*)

When you are discussing Thursday’s daily study on the experience of Philip and the Ethiopian, remind your class of God’s miraculous working power, as depicted in Acts 8–10. The Holy Spirit rapidly opens doors to three people groups in a very short time. In Acts 8, the continent of Africa opens to the gospel. The treasurer of Ethiopia receives Christ as the Holy Spirit providentially leads Philip to him. In Acts 9, Saul is converted. Both his name and life are changed. Paul proclaims the gospel throughout Asia Minor, and churches are raised up throughout the Mediterranean world. In Acts 10, God gives dreams to both Cornelius and Peter to prepare them for their divine encounter. Cornelius, a leader in the Roman army, accepts Christ and no doubt influences his Roman associates. Remind your class that when we take advantage of the opportunities that Christ provides, He will open doors that we cannot even imagine.

Consider This: God prepares people for our witness before we ever meet them. What are some of the ways in which God prepares people to receive His Word?

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Use the following questions to emphasize the need for each believer to be actively involved in witnessing.

Thought Questions:

- ❶ Why isn't revival possible without a commitment to witnessing?
- ❷ What role does revival play in witnessing? What role does witnessing play in revival?

Application Questions:

- ❶ What witnessing activities can we launch as a class?
- ❷ What things can we do weekly or monthly?

Witnessing Activity: Spend time discussing with your class various witnessing/mission projects that you can participate in together. Here are a few possibilities.

- ❶ Develop a list of former and missing members. Begin to pray for them and set aside one Sabbath a month to visit them.
- ❷ Make a list of people who are in the hospital or in nursing homes and visit them monthly.
- ❸ Set aside one Sabbath each quarter to pass out literature in the neighborhood of the church.
- ❹ What other things can you think of? Make your list and then choose a few class-witnessing activities.

► **STEP 4**—Create

Just for Teachers: The key point in this week's lesson is that without witness there can be no revival. The Holy Spirit comes to empower our witness so that we may reach others with the gospel. Praying for revival includes praying for lost people and doing everything we can to reach them for Jesus.

Thought Questions:

- ❶ How has your own experience with Jesus deepened your desire to witness of His love to others?
- ❷ Think back on a time in your life when you were actively involved in service for Christ. Did you feel closer to Jesus then? If so, why? If not, why not?
- ❸ It is possible to become so actively involved that we become "burned out," neglecting prayer and Bible study. How can we prevent this from happening?