

Morning Devotional Series



iWitness

A 10 Day guide for growing your witness

OUC Pastoral Staff

Lessons from a Supermarket

“Do to others as you would have them do to you.” Luke 6:31 NIV

I have a strange confession to make: I love shopping. More specifically, I love to shop at grocery stores or supermarkets. I love to walk up and down the aisles to see what is available, what new items they carry, and what's on sale. But there is one supermarket in particular which I find myself visiting frequently. It's not that this store has the lowest prices in town; that certainly is not the case. It's not that this store has everything one may need or want under its roof; other stores provide everything from juice to jumper cables, t-shirts to tires, and soap to sofas. But what keeps me returning to this particular store is its level of customer service. This supermarket truly is a place “where shopping is a pleasure.”

Several things impress me about this supermarket's customer service. The staff is friendly and greets you when you enter the store. Customer associates constantly ask, “How may I help you?” or “How may I be of service?” or “May I help you find something?” If I do need help locating an item, rather than telling me where the item is located or pointing in the direction where the item may be found, associates routinely show me where the item is located by walking with me to the aisle and then asking if there is anything else they can help me find.

Then there is the look of the store. The store is well-lit, and the décor is inviting. The aisles are wide and not crowded so that several shopping carts can pass each other with ease. The items are arranged neatly on the shelves with the labels facing out so one can easily identify each item. Then, when I'm ready to leave after I have checked out and paid for my items, an associate kindly offers to carry my bags to my car. If I attempt to give the associate a tip or some other financial “thank you,” my offer is routinely refused with the explanation, “No thank you. It was a pleasure to serve you.” Finally, as I walk out the door, an associate would say with a smile, “Thank you for shopping with us. Please come and see us again.” After such an experience, it is no wonder that I do not hesitate to return at the appropriate time.

And this shopping experience reminds me of how we should be as Christians and as a church when it comes to how we relate to church members in general and visitors in particular. If we were honest with ourselves, and compared what happens at my favorite supermarket with what happens at our church, we would need to ask a series of hard questions: Do we greet people and say hello to them when they enter our doors, perhaps for the first time? Are we

quick to ask people how we can help them or if there is anything we can do to make their time with us more pleasurable? If somebody seems lost and needs direction, do we tell them where they need to go, or point them in the direction that they need to go, or do we take the time to walk with them to lead them to where they need to go and then ask if there's anything else we can do to help them?

In looking at our facilities, is our church well-lit with inviting décor? Is everything in our church in its place and in order? And then finally, when people are ready to leave, do we express to them that it was a pleasure for them to worship with us and offer to help them with any other need? Do we thank them for worshipping with us and invite them to come back again? If we practiced this level of customer service, how much different and more welcoming would our churches be? I would certainly want to return to a church like that.

Luke 6:31 encourages us to "Do to others as you would have them do to you." If this is how we want to be treated, then we should look to treat others this way. As we embark upon the upcoming Hope Rally 2022 in particular and our worship services in general, it is my prayer that we would become associates of my favorite supermarket and practice exemplary customer service to the point where people will come to visit us and keep coming back because they find that worship is a pleasure. They will return because of the level of love that we show to each other and every individual who walks through our doors. If people notice our customer service through our love, care, and attention, they will not only return, but they will invite others to experience what they have experienced and, in the process, find Jesus.

Prayer Emphasis: Lord, help me to do and show to others what I would love to be done and shown to me. Help me to increase my level of customer service to others. Let what I do be a catalyst for others to do the same. May I be the loving, caring, warm, friendly, kind, helpful Christian I want others to be towards me.

Action Step: Let us begin today to practice the tenets of good customer service: friendliness, kindness, helpfulness, caring, and thoughtfulness in our interactions today and every day.

- Pastor Paul Goodridge

The Power of the Common Experience

"I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought."

1 Corinthians 1:10 NIV

Yesterday, I mentioned that I love shopping, at least at grocery stores. However, I occasionally find myself needing to go to clothing stores. On one recent occasion, I was in a clothing store with my wife, who was browsing the women's section. At the same time, two sales associates were tending to that section of the store. Before long, my wife was enwrapped in deep dialogue with these two sales associates. Let me pause here to describe the three ladies caught in such captivating conversation. The first sales associate was of East Indian descent, in her mid 20's, and married with no children (although her husband wished to have children). The other sales associate was Caucasian, in her mid 30's, and married with a 4-year-old child. Then there was my wife, who is African American, "slightly older," and married with a 21-year-old and a 17-year-old.

As I observed their interaction, I realized a genuine bonding moment was taking place between these three ladies of different ages, backgrounds, and experiences. The conversation, it turned out, revolved around marriage and parenting. As each woman shared her marriage experiences and the work and commitment it takes to make a marriage work, the other ladies nodded in agreement and affirmed each speaker. As the two ladies with children shared parenting experiences and advice from their unique perspectives, the other listeners were spellbound, thinking about what life would be like when they reached the stage of toddlers and teenagers. Listening to them, it occurred to me that what they shared in common brought them together, and their common experience allowed them to begin to form a friendship.

In thinking about this interaction, it reminds me of how relationships, bonding, and rapport can occur between people with diverse backgrounds, situations, conditions, and circumstances. Despite our differences, be they gender, political, ethnic, socioeconomic, or religious, we all share common needs, desires, and expectations. We all have a need to know who we are and where we belong. We all have a need for family. We all have challenges in the area of health, and we all have questions of faith. Additionally, we are all concerned about making ends meet and the impact of the economy on our ability to take care of our families. We all

have questions about what will happen to us in the future. I call these concerns the five 'F's': Family, Fitness, Faith, Finances, and Future.

God created us human beings to be interdependent. That means we were created to have relationships with each other, despite our differences. When God told Adam that it was not good for him to be alone, not only was He indicating Adam's need for companionship, but He was also pointing out humanity's need for relationships. When we realize that we have common bonds, and shared needs, if we focus on the things that we have in common, as opposed to the things that make us different, then

we are more easily able to connect with each other, form friendships, and develop a rapport with each other. It is through developing a relationship and establishing a rapport that we are more apt to listen to each other and even become more open to listening to and accepting new ideas.

As we seek to connect with others and find areas of common ground, we will find that our efforts to invite people to come to a place that addresses some of their needs will be easier and people will be more apt to respond positively to our invitation.

Prayer Emphasis: Lord, help me to look for areas that I share in common with those with whom I will come in contact today. Help me to see how we are the same and not focus on how we are different. Help me to use the things that we share in common to break down barriers, diffuse friction, and build relationships.

Action Step: As you interact with people today: your friends, family, coworkers, neighbors, and even strangers, try to converse around areas of common interest or concern: Family, Fitness, Faith, Finances, and Future. The more you dwell on the things you share in common, the more rapport you will develop, and the deeper the bonds of friendship will grow.

- Pastor Paul Goodridge

The Currency of Hello

“Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder, wherever the pilot wants to go.”

James 3:4, NIV

The thing I hate the most about moving is packing. You don't realize just how much stuff you have until you have to move it somewhere else. Suddenly, that shirt you thought you lost, the screw that rolled under the couch and disappeared, and that miscellaneous object you put away and forgot you had all suddenly appeared when it's time to move. The only reward in packing is finding lost money. One particular day as my husband and I were packing up our first home together, we lifted and moved the couches preparing for the movers to come and underneath was a gold mine of items we'd been looking for.

Out of every cushion, crack, and crevice we found nickels, dimes, and pennies. Brand new quarters littered the floor where the couch had been. Surprised, we grabbed it all and put it in a piggy bank that my husband kept since he was little. As we continued to pack and declutter, we found more and more lost change. Our 3 year old would excitedly grab the coin and celebrate, “Another one! Another one!” with the same excitement as the first. Finally, we went to put more change in only to realize the bank was full to overflowing. We both looked at each other with the same curiosity coursing through our thoughts, “How much money did we find?”. My husband then counted all the little coins up. We were surprised to find that we had over \$100.00 in change. It was tangible proof that little things add up.

The Bible teaches us that little things matter in the life of the believer as well. Through various metaphors, it highlights that little things can make a big difference- a little yeast rises good Bread (Galatians 5:9), the little rudder turns a large boat (James 3:4), and the small mustard seed that becomes a huge tree (Luke 17:6). These examples remind us that God can do a LOT with a little. This is true for small coins, and for His people. The great commission as stated in Matthew 28:19 calls us to go into all the world and preach the gospel, to make disciples. Disciple making may seem like an overwhelmingly BIG job left up to unqualified humans, but it doesn't have to be mission impossible. Often, when sharing our faith we feel that we have to go big or go home. However, It's important to remember that small deposits can add up to big dividends when helping people experience Jesus for themselves. You don't have to be an eloquent speaker, a gifted singer, or an outgoing, charismatic leader to show people Jesus. Preaching the gospel to all the world can really begin with a smile. A penny can make a dollar and a simple hello can open a door.

We live in a world where people are walking around trying to navigate their days with unspeakable pain, silent grief, and internal shame. Many people just feel alone or unseen, and we have access to a God who heals, comforts, and sees people. Our faith then creates a perfect opportunity to use the little things we have to share Christ. Our smile, a sincere hello, the kindness that flows through the gates of our lips is the currency of the believer. A sincere, "Hello, how are you doing today?" Is a small practice that can be a transformational witnessing tool because it shows the love of God through a lived experience. A quick greeting to your neighbor, a simple 'God bless you' spoken to the cashier you see every time you check out of the grocery store on your way home mean so much to people. Yet we forget that even divine appointments begin with a hello and can speak much louder about the God you believe in than a gospel track tucked under a windshield wiper. Much like the coins under the couch, many people don't even realize that they are missing that kind of daily kindness until someone reaches out with an unexpected hello or verbal blessing.

When Jesus walked the earth, he took the time to see people right where they were. He spoke to them, and he healed them. When Jesus had a conversation, it often led to conviction or conversion. And like Jesus, life changing conversations can be part of our witness too; but you've got to start somewhere. Today, I'm challenging you to start with a simple hello to that person you frequently see, but often ignore. You just might be the small change they need that adds up wanting to know more about the God that we serve, and that kind of change is priceless.

Prayer Emphasis: Lord, help me to use the power of the small things in my life to make deposits of kindness in the lives of others. Let me not be so focused on my own issues or problems that I forget to be a conduit of thoughtfulness and warmth to others. Help me to smile more that others may want to also experience the joy that a relationship with You brings. Amen.

Action Step: Take today to use the currency of kindness and drop a coin in someone's bank by giving them a smile. See how many deposits you can make today and see how God moves in the power of a smile.

- Pastor Kimberly Mann

Cold Call Evangelism

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the name of the Holy Spirit." Matthew 28:19, NIV

I remember during my time in college I was desperately looking for a job to help put gas in my tank and more than peanut butter in my fridge. A friend mentioned there was a place that was hiring off-campus that paid really well. I decided to apply. When I arrived, I found myself in the center of a large warehouse that was set up as a call center. The job consisted of calling a long list of strangers and trying to get them to buy insurance. If they purchased the product you would get extra commission, which could add up to hundreds of dollars a day. The job seemed easy at first, but after being hung up on for the 17th time, I was discouraged. Trying to get people to buy something without knowing who they are and what they need was not only difficult, it was widely unsuccessful. While a few people had success, for the most part, trying to get someone to subscribe to, or buy something from you when they don't know you is like trying to melt ice cream in a freezer. I guess that's why they call it "cold calling". There is no warmth of a relationship to secure trust in the product or a willingness to listen to what you have to say. Needless to say, I quickly realized that "cold calling" was not for me. My attempts to solicit a reward without a relationship created a dynamic that left me disappointed at not getting a sale, and frustrated the customer for having their time interrupted by a stranger with their number.

In an interesting parallel, believers of Christ are often guilty of doing this very thing to others when we share our faith, living like telemarketer Christians. We are quick to want to get people to buy into our brand of theology or Christ-centered worldview, but we have no relationship with them. We are doing "cold calls" on people's souls with the Gospel. While we know the quality of the product we are endorsing, without getting to know the person we are dealing with, we end up with a lot of disappointment. The gospel requires proximity to be effective. We have to be willing to get close to others so we collectively get closer to Christ. So often we want to give people what WE want them to have instead of building a rapport with them and doing more listening than speaking. By building a rapport with people through listening to them, we can know what they actually need and offer them that. This is the physical, tangible, and long-term ministry of presence and friendship. When people can see that the God we serve can meet their needs and give them their hearts desire, they are more likely to want to buy into what we are offering- the Life changing, grace giving, gospel of Jesus. Our cliques and friendship circles cannot be so tightly gated that there isn't room for new faces, and new friends. We cannot be so concerned with being in the world, but not of the world that we forget we were called to interact with the world so they may see Jesus in us (Matthew

28:19) and follow Christ. However, that has to start with a relationship, a friendship, just building rapport with people so that they see the effects of the Gospel on how you live and love. Model the gospel. The only way to do that is to be someone who lives in community with others, on purpose. There is a warmth that comes with genuine friendship. And it is this warmth, this comfort that makes room for an invitation to church or Bible study or prayer. Think of how many times you've hung up on someone trying to get you to extend your car warranty. Cold calls don't work on warm bodies. Much like admonishing someone about the Sabbath or the health message in a parking lot is not going to be as effective as the ministry of genuine friendship.

Jesus understood this. When we look at Jesus' ministry, he sat and talked with people of all classes, races, situations, and circumstances without judgment and with complete compassion (John 3:1-12), he went to their homes and ate with them (Luke 18:9-14), he listened to their stories and their sorrows and he SAW them before he healed them (John 4). That's the kind of witness that God is calling us to be. Today, think about those persons at your job, your neighbor, the single parent you know of, that God has put on your heart to minister to. Have you asked their names, and do you know their children, have you eaten with them? Do you know if there's a specific need in their life that could be met by you? Witnessing can start here, with something as small as just reaching out to check on people when they come to mind. Take a moment today and ask God to reveal to you someone who you can begin to cultivate community with, no hidden agenda, no ulterior motive to baptize them this year, but just genuine concern for their well being. Is there some hobby or some shared experience that can provide the groundwork for a new friendship? There is evangelistic power in friendship. Because while a flier about the Sabbath may garner the attention of a few, the fruit of friendship can yield huge dividends for the Kingdom, and for your own soul.

Prayer Emphasis: Lord, it is my desire to share the gospel of Jesus with others with a warm heart. Help me to be intentional about cultivating relationships with people in my proximity, not with ulterior motives, but to find genuine connection. Give me the courage to create community as I step out of my comfort zone to develop new friendships and nurture current ones. Help me to act on building relationships with people you've put in my path, amen.

Action Step: In your quiet reflection or prayer time, ask God to reveal to you someone you can connect with on more than a surface level. This could be a mom who needs someone to talk to about parenting challenges, or an old friend from school who's been on your mind that you've been meaning to reach out to. Today, be intentional about making a connection and reach out to them through an actual phone call or personal message to see how they are doing.

-Pastor Kimberly Mann

Full of the Holy Ghost

***"But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God."
Acts 7:55, KJV***

The Holy Spirit focuses us in the midst of the enemy's attacks. What a place for Him to show up! We would expect to see him in church, but this wasn't a typical place. Definitely not the ideal situation to make an appearance. No praise team or a hymn of praise to God. It would seem like a baptism would have been more appropriate, but no one was in the water. In fact, while baptism is a burial of the old life and a transition to a new spiritual one, this was the exact opposite - minutes away from the end of physical life.

Religious people are here though. The elders, the deacons, the Pharisees and Sadducees, and anyone else that was offended by young Stephen's proclamation of the Gospel. They listened to him trace God's divine hand through the life of the patriarchs. The religious leaders were okay with him speaking about the sons of Jacob and God's miraculous deliverance in Egypt. They probably smiled when the young deacon mentioned Moses and the miracle on Mount Sinai. That probably should've been the moment that the Holy Spirit was mentioned. Yet in Acts 2:51, the scene shifted when Stephen correctly accused the religious leaders of resisting the Holy Ghost. He unashamedly put the rejection of Christ at their feet and identified them as murderers.

Instead of repenting, they dug in. Instead of changing, they charged. No repentance, just rage. Grinding their teeth in anger, the mob descended upon him with malicious intent. It's here we see the Holy Ghost fill Stephen. Take a moment and read what happened...

When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. (Acts 7:54-55, KJV)

Notice the impact of God's Spirit in us and on us. Being filled with the Spirit helps us focus on Christ and not the crowd. Circumstances don't have to be ideal. The situation doesn't need to be seamless. In fact, the worst it gets the more clearly we can see the Savior. When we share the Word, not everyone will appreciate the truth. Stephen did some things that we can learn to do in our approach to the element of witnessing:

1. He kept the conversation biblical. He spent time in the Word and was able to share a biblical presentation that was undeniably factual and clear.
2. He was not afraid of the faces of the people. He was able to look to heaven in the midst of the mob.
3. He was okay with the consequences. It was not his job to confront the mob. He was only to share the truth with them.

Now we pray there are no stones picked up and thrown in your direction. Yet the Bible does say there are situations that will not be ideal. We learn from the life of Stephen we can be alone, without a friend, and notice that the Holy Ghost didn't just stand beside Him. He did what He wants to do with all of us... fill us. As a result, Stephen was able to stand in the midst of not-so-ideal circumstances, proclaim the Word of God - and get a clear glimpse of Jesus!

Prayer Emphasis: We pray that God will fortify you in the midst of the attacks of the enemy. We ask God to use them to give you a greater resolve to trust in Him believing He can get glory from the situation.

Action Step: It is imperative that you keep your eyes on God when you are attacked. Remind yourself that God is with you every step of the way. When you feel like responding negatively, write down a short prayer for your "attacker" and ask God to work a miracle on your behalf.

- Dr. Toussaint Williams

Where the Fire Resides

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?”

1 Corinthians 6:19, KJV

The Holy Spirit desires to live IN you.

Not too long ago, a used car salesman went viral for a catchy phrase that garnered the attention of the nation. He hopped out of the backseat of vans and appeared from the inside of the trunks of cars. He always flashed wads of cash in his hands. He reminded his future buyers about the importance of buying cars from his lot. Not only would they get a good deal here, but his commercials suggested that his car lot was where the “money resides”. It was a call to come and experience the thrill of getting a car and apparently a whole lot of money too!

As catchy as the phrase was, there was and still is truth in the statement. People want to go where they can find a place they can trust. A place where they can be at peace. And we all want to go where we can save some money! It seems a little comical though. Would people really flock to a place to purchase a vehicle in order to be where the money resides? So what happens when instead of money, one desires something more, something sustainable, something supernatural like an indescribable FIRE. The Holy Spirit is not too different from those individuals in the commercial. Yet unlike the prospective buyers, He does not come looking to pursue a good deal. The major transaction was done in Calvary. Golgotha's hill housed the execution that made salvation possible. We don't have to pay, but we do have to accept Him into our hearts and lives.

The Department of Motor Vehicles has a rule that I have yet to be able to circumvent. No matter what state I've lived in, there is one rule that has not changed. When you apply for a new driver's license, you have to have proof of residence. Usually, they require an electric bill or residential paperwork from the mortgage or rental agreement saying you live at the suggested address. You cannot merely visit the residence. A picture in front of the house will not suffice. To say you know the owner is not enough. There has to be a personal, tangible connection between the applicant and the residence.

I believe that's what Paul is referencing when he reminds the believers that they are not their own. They've been bought with a price. The Holy Spirit wants to live inside them. Notice the Holy Spirit does not want to come by for a visit or be a casual acquaintance. The Holy Spirit's central residence is your heart.

In a practical sense, God has always wanted to be intimately involved with His people. Since creation, we've seen God seeking after His people. With Adam and Eve, He searched for them in the garden He created for them. In the wilderness, God dwelt in the tabernacle that was in the very center of the camp. In the fiery furnace, God joined the three courageous young men in the fire. In these instances and many more, God proved to be visibly present in the lives of his children.

But what about today? Is God truly in your story? Or is He an extra that you allow to pass through some of your life's scenes from time to time? The Holy Spirit enables God's presence to be visible in your life. Are the people around you flocking in to see how He's moving and working in you? Do they come to you to be "where the FIRE resides"?

Prayer Emphasis: May God's spirit find residence in you. May He be allowed to go into every room in your heart. Every hallway of insecurity; every closet of jealousy, hatred, and frustration. We pray that the Spirit will find not a perfect place, but a place He is allowed to perfect as He abides in you!

Action Step: Don't wait for your feelings to confirm His presence. Write down (or take a screenshot of) 1 Corinthians 6:19. When you sense feelings of doubt or discouragement arise, read this verse... attempt to commit it to memory to remind yourself of His promise to dwell in you!

- Dr. Toussaint Williams

Be Intentional

"The one who is wise saves lives." Proverbs 11:30, NIV

There is a song by Travis Greene called, "Intentional." In the song, the songwriter declares that God is intentional. Everything is working for "my" good. As followers of Christ, we often acknowledge and pronounce God's intentionality. And it's true. Paul says it like this, "He has chosen us in [Jesus] before the foundation of the world." (Ephesians 1:4) Here we can see God's intentionality not only in his pre-planning of our salvation but in his selection of our Savior. Now, if God has been intentional in saving us, and if God is intentional in working all things for our good, we, too, must be intentional. How? We must be intentional in our witness of God's saving power.

Be Intentional

Solomon declares, "The one who is wise saves lives." Proverbs 11:30 NIV This text can mean that wise people save people or mean that to save people takes wisdom. I believe both interpretations are correct. But for this chapter (and the next one) we will focus on the latter: to save people takes wisdom, to save people takes intentionality. Be intentional.

Jesus, Our Example

If ever there was one who was intentional in witness, it was Jesus. While on earth Jesus was the consummate strategist in sharing his faith. Jesus, himself, says he is, "The faithful and true witness." Revelation 3:14 Therefore, Jesus is our example. Location, Location, Location During Jesus' public ministry, Jesus gave his first witness and searched for his first followers in the region of Galilee. Galilee was a community that had both Jews and Gentiles, both religious and pagan people, both Jewish and Greek culture.

"Leaving Nazareth, [Jesus] went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: 'Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.'" Matthew 4:13-16 NIV

By choosing Galilee, not only would the first people Jesus reached be diverse, but so would his disciples be diverse in their life experiences. Though Jewish, his followers were familiar with other cultures. Thus, it can be seen that Jesus was intentional even in the location he chose to witness and begin his ministry.

On Schedule

But not only was Jesus intentional in selecting where he would witness, Jesus was intentional in his timing. The story of the woman at the well highlights this fact. While at first glance it may seem [like] a random encounter, Jesus choosing to travel through Samaria and sit at a well that the Samaritans cherished for nourishment and ancestral significance was on purpose. In fact, John gives the spoiler alert, “But he needed to go through Samaria.” John 4:4 Jesus sits at the well at noon and the woman arrives about that time. While she may have seen it as a coincidence, to Jesus—the master witness—she arrived “on schedule.”

Prayer Emphasis: Can you think of another instance that Jesus showed intentionality in his witness? What are some examples you can think of? How was the person who helped to bring you into a relationship with Jesus intentional? Take time now to pray, thanking God that he is intentional, thanking God for the person who was intentional in witnessing to you, and asking God for greater understanding of what it means to be intentional.

Action Step: Tomorrow we will explore specific ways we can be intentional in our witness. In the meantime, besides praying for intentionality, for Bible study, search out stories in the scripture that show intentionality in witnessing.

- Pastor Marc Raphael

Be Intentional, Part 2

"The one who is wise saves lives." Proverbs 11:30, NIV

In our last chapter, we considered that before the earth was created, God was intentional in saving us, that on earth Jesus was intentional in witnessing his faith, and that today Jesus is our example. In this chapter, we will explore various ways that we can witness with purpose and ways to exercise wisdom in sharing our faith with others.

Ten Strategies

We have seen how Jesus was intentional in both the location and the time in which he chose to witness. We will now look at ten additional and/or similar ways to witness with purpose. The strategies we will consider are in scripture given as encouragement, commandment, and/or illustration of intentional witnessing.

Choose a Specific Demographic

"Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel." Matthew 10:5, 6

Choose Every Demographic

"Go and make disciples of all nations." Matthew 28:19

Be Relatable to Audience

"I [Paul] have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some." 1 Corinthians 9:22

Find Hotspots

"On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there." Acts 16:13

Avoid Specific Places

"Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia." Acts 16:6

Go to Specific Places

"During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, 'Come

over to Macedonia and help us.' After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." Acts 16:9, 10

Travel Light

"Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts—no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worthy of his keep." Matthew 10:9, 10

Choose Time Carefully

"So then he told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.'" John 11:14, 15

Discern the Mood

"As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them. But they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, 'What are you discussing together as you walk along?' They stood still, their faces downcast." Luke 24:15-17

Wait for God's Power to Witness

"Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about . . . You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." Acts 1:4-8

Intentionality is Endless

These ten strategies to witness intentionally are only a few of many found in the Bible. In addition, there are ways to witness with purpose that are not found in the Bible. How do we know that? God says so. "Behold I will do a new thing." Isaiah 43:19 And Jesus says, "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these because I go to my Father." John 14:12

Why Be Intentional

Jesus gave witness to his faith and gifting in various ways. Jesus healed two blind men by touching them, another by speaking to him, and still another by making eye salve. Why did Jesus heal the same condition in different ways? Was it to show variety? Was it to show he can heal as he pleases? Perhaps. But I believe Jesus gave the method of healing that would most impact the person being healed. Jesus was intentional because intentionality works and intentionality is how God works. After healing the lame man of thirty-eight years by the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath in front of or nearby his accusers, Jesus declared, "My

Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working . . . Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself. He can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.” John 5:17-19 NIV

So while we may not have the gift of healing, and while we may not be moved by God to use all or any of the ten strategies listed above, God has given us gifts and God will give us methods to witness because God is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” 2 Peter 3:9 KJV

Prayer Emphasis: Have you ever witnessed with intention? What are some ways you have witnessed with purpose? Have you used or could you see yourself using one or more of the ten strategies mentioned above? Which one(s)? What are some ways not mentioned that you can share your faith with purpose? What will you do today to witness on purpose? Pray that God will help you to be intentional in witnessing for him.

Action Step: Go and share your faith in the unique way(s) that God gives you, in the unique or common space(s) he leads you, to the unique or familiar person or persons he calls you to reach. Go, “Be Intentional!”

- Pastor Marc Raphael

Apostle Paul's Prayer for all Saints

"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better."

Ephesians 1:17, NIV

In Ephesians 1:15-23, Paul prays for the release of a revelatory spirit (spiritual wisdom) on the Church in the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ, His son. When we think about relationships, what generally comes to mind are the close and intimate relationships that we either enjoy now or long to have. Oftentimes, we find ourselves considering our current human relationships and the added value they bring or the negative impact they cause on our emotional well-being.

I have been married for 24 years now, and I realize that my wife and I are still learning each other as we grow older together. We learn things about ourselves in our intimate relationships that we may not realize under any other circumstance. Marriage has taught me how to be more intentional about some key areas in my life, like consistent prayer, Bible study, and healthy communication.

I would also say that a more complete understanding of my spouse leads to a deep and rich intimate partnership. With that being said, in Ephesians 1:15-23, Paul champions the infinite worth of our salvation in Jesus Christ, our brother and the Son of God. Paul's earnest prayers for the believers in Ephesus not only include praise for their spiritual success, but also an appeal for their continued spiritual growth. In this scripture, we read about the supremacy of Jesus Christ as the key factor in the believer's existence and acceptance. A key take away is this: as believers, we are not only followers of Jesus Christ, but we are also recipients of His priceless blessings and power. Here, Paul is seeking to remind the believers in Ephesus and all of us who read his words that a complete understanding of Jesus Christ leads to a greater love for Him and a stronger faith in His saving sacrifice made at Calvary, dying on the cross for you and me.

It is imperative for us as last day believers to possess a heart that longs for a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ, that is rooted in love for Him and others around us. There are so many distractions that the devil throws our way to make us too busy for God and/or too overwhelmed to even think about allowing Him to speak to us in our daily worship. Today's

worry can drown out the still small voice of the Holy Spirit trying to bring us comfort through God's word. I must say that as I minister to people around me, I see the despair with which the enemy of souls has been weighing down humanity. We cannot allow Satan, the lost one, to over-stress us and get us to join his ranks in the ultimate destruction of the wicked.

Here are several things we need to do to be on the winning side with the saints who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

1. Know whose we are. (We belong to God the Father as sons & daughters, Romans 8:14-17)
2. Understand the sacrifice made. (Jesus died and rose again giving us salvation, John 3:16)
3. Tell others. (With God's given wisdom we are to tell our salvation testimony, Revelation 12:11)

When we begin to put the word of God in our hearts and minds, the transformative power of His word has a perfecting work. Like Paul's prayer, we will begin to see in clearer tones the exceeding greatness of our brother, Jesus Christ, who now sits at the right hand of God the Father with all power in heaven and earth. Once our spiritual eyes are open, we can share this experience with those around us with a confidence we may not now possess. The Holy Spirit is waiting for us to accept the call that God has placed on our lives. Despite the toils and cares of this life, we can accept the life of eternal glory that has been prepared for His children. It is my prayer that you, as the reader, enjoy the intimate relationship that God desires for you and Him to have. May God bless you!

Prayer Emphasis: Pray to know the will of God in our lives and to have a closer walk with Him.

Action Step: Take the three points that have been shared with us to better understand God's will and put them into practice. We must know who we are and whose we are, and start with our family circle by helping them understand this amazing truth.

- Dr. Malcolm G. Taylor, III

Did You Know That Jesus Prayed for You?

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world will believe that you have sent me." John 17: 20, 21 NIV

John 17:20-26 is a heartwarming message to the Christian of any time and generation on earth after Christ's resurrection. In this chapter, Jesus has prayed tenderly for His disciples and asked His Father to keep them. Towards the end of these beautiful words spoken by Jesus, my spiritual mind sees the vision of our suffering Savior understanding the need to pray for His future believers. Now one might ask, why this prayer for the future believers? Well, Jesus acknowledged that the disciples and those who walked with Him during His ministry on earth had direct and infallible evidence of Him being the Son of God. But Jesus understood the tremendous faith that we are to accept and possess to acknowledge Him as our Lord and Savior.

Many of us have probably read this passage of scripture and lightly acknowledged that the God of heaven in human form and flesh actually prayed for His followers. Yes, He did! But do you really realize that God the Son prayed for you!? Yes, Jesus had every single believer on His mind when He asked the Father to allow us to be with Him in glory. Just think about this love in action that is intimated, when we read that the last few hours of Jesus' life were going to be the worst agonizing moments for any human being ever in the history of all creation. Yes, Jesus knowing what He was about to experience took the time to pray for me, for you, for all of us. What Love!

Jesus also requested of His Father that we would believe through their message written in the word. This message is the gospel of Jesus Christ and His ultimate sacrifice made at Calvary. I am made speechless when I think about what Jesus did for us when He, "who being in the form of God did not consider it robbery to be equal with God", became flesh. Jesus made Himself the lowest form of creation by becoming a slave and being crucified, He died. This God-man prayed for you and me that we may experience what He had with the Father before the time began. What Love!

As you read this devotional, please read the prayer that Jesus prayed for His followers and think about what that means in your Christian walk. The enemy of souls works hard to remove the knowledge and appreciation of this love that was shown to us through the plan of salvation. Satan knows that if we allow the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us into all truth, his slimy grip of confusion will be of no effect in our life. We must incorporate a strong spirit of belief to conquer our own natural ability to doubt what the Holy Trinity has displayed for us in this epic plan of redemption.

The question is, how can I allow the will of God to bring this prayer to fruition?

1. We must allow the Spirit's perfect work, to work. James 1:4
2. We must expect for God's measure of faith to be imparted. Hebrews 12:2 3. We must exercise our given faith. James 2:14-26
4. We must understand what pleases God. Hebrews 11:6
5. We must believe that God's promises are sure. 1 Corinthians 1:20 These five things that have been given to experience Jesus' prayer on a deeper and more personal level need to become a regular daily routine. We are in the last days of this earth's history and just surface knowledge and a casual experience with the Word is not going to work for anyone wanting to be saved. We have to long for our daily personal time with God more than any wish or dream we may currently have. When you think about tithing, we are to return 10% of His blessings back to Him. Let us start today with tithing our time back to God; we know that tomorrow is not promised and we only have today. To be perfectly honest, we only have this moment. There are 24 hours in a day, strive to give as much of your day as possible to God so that you can be on the sea of glass with the saints singing the songs of heaven and casting your crown at the Savior's feet.

Prayer Emphasis: Incorporate in your prayer life a prayer of gratitude and thankfulness for God's care in praying for His children.

Action Step: Because of this amazing fact that the God of heaven prayed for us through His Son Jesus Christ, we must practice our own self encouragement. We are to share this encouragement with as many people as we can today.

- Dr. Malcolm G. Taylor, III