

Home Group Series 2024

5. Witness in Prayer.

'Envy' – is not a nice word, and can be one of the seven deadly sins! But I confess that I did envy someone once. It was my brother in law!

Over six foot, and a policeman (or should I say, a Chief Constable – now retired). And why did I envy him? Well, it was because, when it came to witnessing, he seemed to be the sort who could strike up a conversation, seemingly with anyone, which rapidly turned into a discussion of Christian things, which, in turn, led to that person either coming to church, or coming to Christ there and then.

Now, obviously, over the years, I've seen people come to Christ myself during my preaching, and even in my college lectures, God sometimes graciously shone His light into some darkened heart, and drew that person to Himself, but in no way like my esteemed relative! Why couldn't I do it like him? Where was I missing out?

It didn't help that back in my early Christian days, more than one book had been written on 'Witnessing' which told you how to do it, and which made it seem so easy – except that it wasn't – for me at least. However, it became clearer as I got older and wiser and studied my Bible more.

The fact is that, while we are all responsible to be ready to speak up of Christ, as God gives us opportunities – even if that's only an invitation to come to our church – the Holy Spirit gives us different spiritual gifts. Now this is apparent when we get behind the accounts of what went on in those early Christian days. We read there about headline characters like Paul, but he couldn't have done it all by himself, which is something he's quick to admit – and reading between the lines we also hear of others described specifically as 'evangelists', who must have gone about effectively 'gossiping the Gospel' (like my brother in law), because that was the gift they had been given.

It then struck me that those who had written those unhelpful books were in all probability some who had been gifted themselves in that way, and who assumed that everyone else could do it if only they tried (When what we're talking about here is not a man-made method, but a work of God Himself)!

When eventually I had it out with my brother in law, commending him on his work over the years and telling him how much I envied him, he couldn't see that he had been an evangelist all that time. Instead, he told me that he had been envious of me! After all, he said, I had been gifted as a preacher/ teacher!

In my experience, we can often find evangelists in many churches, sometimes exercising that gift and doing the work, who wouldn't call themselves such – but very valuable they are. For example, when our efforts of sharing the Gospel person to person with someone only takes us so far, we can admit, 'I don't know that myself, but I can introduce you to someone who does.' And then pray that the encounter you have set up send with someone coming to Christ – or coming to Church.

JB

Questions for Home Groups

5. Witness in Prayer

Acts 12 v5-17, Matthew 6 v5-8

1. Can you think of any examples of where the church has been 'earnestly' praying for someone or something? What happened? (Acts 12 v5)
2. Why do you think Peter was being so closely guarded? (V6)
3. Although dazed and confused Peter chose to follow the angel who appeared to him and lead him to escape (v7-10). What strikes you about this sequence of events?
4. Why do you think that Peter headed for Mary's house? (v12)
5. Even though the people had been praying for Peter they were still 'astonished' when he turned up at the door (v15 & 16). Have you ever been shocked or surprised when God has answered your prayers in such a dramatic way?
6. Peter insisted it was God's will that brought him out of prison (v17). We are not told if he knew he had been prayed for. If we knew that the church had been praying for us, would it make a difference? How does it make you feel to know that you have been prayed for?
7. (Matthew 6 v5-8) What is Jesus emphasising between the 'hypocrites' prayers of and those offered in secret?
8. What are you finding more difficult in your prayer time at the moment? (share only what you feel comfortable with) What is more encouraging?
9. Jesus said that God already knows what we are going to pray for (v8). Is there any point then?
10. Why do you feel it is important for the fellowship of the church to continue to witness in prayer?