

Home Group Series 2024

7. Witness with Praise.

Where do you live? It's the sort of question you might ask of someone you had just met - expecting, in reply, a place or a district - but those locations don't even to begin to touch on the most important place where you are domiciled. For the fact is that in this country, at this time, we are all of us living in a highly toxic location. We're not living in the shadow of a volcano, or a dodgy nuclear plant or the track of hurricanes or tsunamis - instead we are living among people who, by and large, have taken their leave of God. And that will affect pretty well all that they think or do, in a similar way to what our Christian lives and faith should be doing for us. Those of us defined as oldies, were born and brought up in a very different land, a land where only a minority of the British population would have classed themselves as atheists. This doesn't mean that the others were all out and out Christians, but that the Christian faith - part of our upbringing - in school as much as in church - provided the background against which the majority fumbled their way through life - against a background of well-known hymns and Bible stories. Nowadays that simply isn't so.

The challenge we face is that we have to live among people who think - and often live - very differently from us while maintaining what we know to be God-given truth - 'in the world, yet not of it'. It's not that all our neighbours and non-Christian friends live disreputable lives. Many can be decent, honest, likeable people - unconsciously displaying the remnants of Christians' values, otherwise abandoned! They can become good friends, as long as we are prepared to overlook some of the things they say or do. And these are the people to whom we have to witness. But as we think and pray about that, let's remember that their world may well be very different from ours. God may be a foreign word; faith an alien idea. You may be amazed by their thoroughgoing ignorance of spiritual things, and most certainly of the Bible. You may feel that you have failed to make any impression on them. But don't be dismayed. Remember that it's the Holy Spirit who makes God's truth true to people - which is why we need to surround our efforts with prayer. And if they politely brush off what you have to say, don't stop praying for them. Who knows how or when that seed of truth may take root in their lives.

A brother and sister were first brought along to our Church, and came to Christ there. At home, such was the change in their lives, that Mum also started coming. But Dad was a different matter. A pleasant sort of bloke, we got to know him well, but every Sunday when the rest came to Church, he would head for the golf links - until one morning when, to everyone's surprise, he just asked, 'What time's Church?' Hardly daring to say anything else, they told him, and he went with them, and for several weeks sat beside his wife. In our Church, Communion Bread and Wine were distributed along the pews and naturally, he passed it by - until one morning, as it approached, he gave his wife's hand a squeeze! - and the miracle had taken place. After that there was no stopping him! He shared his testimony with everyone he met - at home, at work, at the golf Club, you name it. He became one of the most effective evangelists in the Church. So don't think you have failed if one of your friends turns down that offer you made to Alpha or that supper. Don't write them off. Love, patience, prayer, and consistent Christian behaviour may unleash God's work in their lives, almost without them knowing it!

Questions for Home Groups

7. Witness with Praise

Psalm 150, Acts 16 v22-34

1. What can praising someone or something look like?
2. Why is praise attractive?
3. Why is praise often done with singing and music?
4. Paul and Silas decided to praise God in prison. Why can praise outside of a church service be particularly powerful?
5. What opportunities do we have to praise God in more informal circumstances or unusual settings?
6. What were the results of Paul and Silas praising in prison, both immediately and later on?
7. 'Mission is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Mission exists because worship doesn't.' How might heaven impact our lives today? (Revelation 7 v9-12)

Additional Questions:

- Is there a difference between praise and worship?
- What's special about praise in church?