

## **Whatever Happened to Witnessing?**

Acts 8:26-49

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September 16, 2018

Whatever happened to witnessing?

Something must have happened to it, at least among Baptists.

If we use statistics to gauge whether we are witnessing, something has happened.

Last June, “Christianity Today” reported that our denomination had its lowest number of baptisms since 1946; its lowest membership since 1990; and lowest worship attendance since 1996.

(<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2017/june/southern-baptist-convention-churches-baptisms-sbc-acp.html>)

There are lots of reasons for these low numbers, but one reason must have something to do with our lack of witnessing.

Or some might say that there is a lot of witnessing taking place. The problem is that the evangelical witness is just bad. Evangelicals turn people away and not toward Jesus.

When people who profess to be Christian do not reflect Jesus, people notice that disconnect. If they cannot see Jesus in Christians, they see no reason to be in church, or in the scriptures, or in God’s will.

Another way to look at it is that Christians are always going to be in the minority. Jesus said that the road we walk is a narrow road and the gate we enter is a narrow gate, and few will choose it. Even when we live a righteous life and reflect the life of Jesus and invite people to follow him, few will.

However, we are commanded to “Go and make disciples.”

We are supposed to multiply our faith by sharing Jesus with others. That’s not possible unless we become a witness.

So, whatever happened to witnessing?

Could it be that we disqualify ourselves by making a simple exercise into a Ph.D. process?

Witnessing is supposed to be elementary, as elementary as one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.

When we make witnessing about having to learn a speech or about memorizing something that sounds like a sale's pitch, or think you have to graduate from a class, witnessing is beginning to get more complicated than it should. While we can learn something from all these things, witnessing is supposed to be more elementary and more natural.

Making disciples is every Christian's responsibility. You cannot make a disciple without being a witness. If you are a Christian, that happened because someone was a witness to you.

This text reminds us of the importance of having someone witness to us in order to understand who Jesus is and how we might know him as Lord and Savior.

The text teaches us that we can be effective as a witness by remembering these three words and practicing them: prayer, care, and share.

Can you pray? Yes, you can.

Do you care? Yes, you should.

Will you share? It's easier than you think.

1) To be a good witness, we must pray. As we pray, God does for us what that angel did for Phillip.

I am not accustomed to talking to angels. I've only met one person who told me she saw an angel and I didn't have any reason to doubt her. Even though we have angel stories in the Bible, they do seem to be a bit shy considering all the opportunities they have to make themselves known.

However, are they all that needed since we have the gift of the Holy Spirit?

Jesus, the Son of God, is present within us through his Spirit. Who needs angels when we have the Spirit of Jesus as our constant connection to God?

When we pray, God impresses on us things we should do and say, like make a phone call, write a letter, speak to a person, pay someone's bill, knock on someone's door, buy someone a gift, spend time with some, go the extra mile, extend forgiveness, or ask someone a question.

Before we can speak to others about God, we need to be speaking with God, like Phillip was doing.

A huge part of witnessing is prayer.

If we are listening to God, the Spirit will prompt us on what to do.

2) To be a good witness, we just need to obey the prompting of God's Holy Spirit, just as Phillip did.

Look at things like this: Today a play is taking place called September 16. God is the Pay Director.

Through his Spirit, God will prompt us and give us all the cues we need to enter the stage in the proper time and to say and do the appropriate things.

God will help us block our schedules and interact with the cast, crew, and the audience. He will lead us to any relevant information that might be necessary to help us move through our day.

It's a great feeling to know that we are not at this stage alone. Jesus said, 26 "But the helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. (John 14:26 NASB)

It's one thing to know where to go or what to do, and it's another thing to have the heart to do it.

Phillip invested time to go and find the person the Holy Spirit was leading him to find. He loved that person even before He saw him.

The second word is CARE.

Do we care enough to give ourselves away like that?

Jonah knew where to go and what God wanted him to do, but he didn't care enough about the city of Nineveh to go share with them the message God gave him.

It took a taxi service by a great fish to swallow and spit him out on the shore of Nineveh before he decided to be a witness for God.

How far will we sink before we realize that caring for others is not only beneficial for them, but it is also the way to abundant life for us?

Phillip heard the angel of God tell him to "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." He obeyed the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

That's all we need to do to be an effective witness. Just obey the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Phillip knew he was going to encounter someone on that road, but he didn't know who. It could have been anyone.

That meant that Phillip's heart had to be open to sharing with anyone who came down that road?

3) To be a good witness, we need to be willing to share with anyone that God sends us to.

Whatever happened to witnessing?

I think I know. We are a lot like Jonah. We don't witness if we don't like the color, religion, economic bracket, age, or sexual orientation of the person God sends to us. Because of that, we turn around, and we go home.

Phillip could have done the same thing. However, notice what Phillip did.

The text says that the person he saw was "an Ethiopian eunuch, a prominent official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means 'queen of the Ethiopians')."

When he found all of this out, a little at a time, he had a choice. He could have turned and gone back home, but he never did.

In fact, when he saw him and the Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it," the text says that Phillip ran to the chariot. He was not affected by the fact that the man was black or from another country. The Greek word "aithiops" is best translated simply as "African." ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian\\_eunuch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian_eunuch))

Phillip later learned that this man was different religiously.

It seems that this man was a God-fearer. He was a Gentile sympathizer to Judaism. This is the reason he had been to the temple to worship. It also explains why he had a copy of the scroll of Isaiah.

The person was also different sexually. Three times this passage says this person was a eunuch. It's as if Luke doesn't want you to miss the point.

I don't mean to be too graphic here, but at an early age, this man had his manhood removed without his consent.

Eunuchs were usually servants or slaves, and their castration made them more trustworthy to have around the royal court. Because they were often near the royals, they usually handled sensitive information and valuables. The Eunuch was an important person to the royal court.

While Luke's Gospel teaches that Cornelius was the first Gentile to confess Jesus, this story is significant because this person is the first Gentile convert baptized to the Christian faith. He is from a sexual minority, a different race, a different ethnicity, and nationality from Phillip. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian\\_eunuch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian_eunuch))

Yet Phillip did not hesitate to witness to him or to baptize him.

First the angel, then the Spirit led him to the man.

First, it was prayer. Then it was care. Then he shared with him the gospel.

He was in the spirit of prayer. Then he had to care. Then he had to share.

Phillip heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

<sup>31</sup> “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

<sup>32</sup> This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,  
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.

<sup>33</sup> In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth.”

<sup>34</sup> The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” <sup>35</sup> Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

The best time to share is when we place ourselves in a position to answer someone’s question about Jesus.

We have to be there ready and willing to share when the person is ready and willing to receive.

You cannot force Jesus on anyone.

Did you notice the way Phillip positioned himself to share was with one very well-placed question: “Do you understand what you are reading?”

Have you ever noticed that was the approach of Jesus? Jesus was not prone to lecturing. However, he was prone to asking questions.

Jesus asked questions. When invited, he told stories. That’s a great way to witness.

Ask questions. Get people to talk about themselves and how they feel about things until they ask you about your faith. Then tell them about Jesus.

Whatever happened to witnessing?

We have been taught that we have to cram Jesus down people’s throats when all along, what we need is to wait for an invitation to share.

We must work for an invitation by showing people that we care.

We must work for an invitation by asking well-timed and well-placed questions.

Here are a few examples:

1. When you have problems or crises, how do you manage to get through them?
2. Do you think God has a plan for your life?
3. What gives meaning to your life?
4. How is God working in your life right now?
5. What do you think happens to us when we die?
6. How do you determine what's most important in your life?
7. Do you think God cares if we go to church or not?

Any time we care enough to ask a question, it banks a little credibility with people. They know we care about what they think, even if it's different from what we think, and they become a little more open to hearing our story.

Sometimes, they invite us to share our story or what we know, just like the Ethiopian Eunuch did when he asked Phillip to explain the text from Isaiah.

In Phillip's story, he must have told the African man that part of the conversion experience is to follow Jesus in believer's baptism, because how else would the man have known to ask for baptism when he came to some water?

“Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” [37] 38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.”

Whatever happened to witnessing?

The truth is, it's still happening every day.

However, again, the question is, “What kind of witnessing are we doing?”

If we are praying, we should go where the Spirit says go. If we care, we should go where the Spirit says go and to whomever the Spirit says we should go. When we share, we should share with whomever the Spirit says we should share.

Right now, let's care enough to ask God to lead us to those he wants us to listen to and to witness to?

Let's be passionate enough to follow the Spirit so the numbers of baptized believers and those who know the Lord and spend eternity with Him in Heaven will increase.

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