

# Sermon 1

## Discipleship in Action

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### Main Text: Mark 1:16

Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men

Every believer knows that witnessing is supposed to be part of the Christian life. Jesus said, “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17).

But it’s also no secret that we often struggle to witness. Why can witnessing sometimes feel like such a hard thing to do?

Always remember the three essential components in the life of a disciple: prayer, Bible study, and witnessing. The one that brings us into direct contact with the people we are trying to reach is witnessing or working to seek and save the lost. The problem is, if we skip prayer and Bible study and go straight to witnessing, we will lose all our motivation!

You see, we can never truly be a “fountain of life” (John 4:14)—sharing salvation with others—unless we are drinking from the *Water of Salvation* ourselves. We cannot give to the world something we do not have. When our devotional life is connected to the Source and we are commune with Jesus in prayer and Bible study, witnessing to others is oftentimes easier to do.

It was because Jesus knew that witnessing requires a power we do not have that He made the promise He did in Acts 1:8: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me.”

We need the Holy Spirit to witness! How often do we read books and take classes on witnessing, while we neglect personal time with Christ? Would we take a long drive without putting fuel in the tank? Would we take a final exam without reading or studying ahead of time? Witnessing is no different. It requires preparation, and it requires power. And that only comes from communion with God.

Yet the Bible warns that trying to be disciples without spiritual preparation is a unique and big problem for God’s people in the last days.

## Form Without Power

Read 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

One of the greatest hindrances to our Christian witness occurs when we are too easily satisfied with a superficial religious experience. Paul calls this a “form” of godliness. We may go to church, and even participate in outreach, but the power that motivates and transforms the life can still be missing.

Ellen White strikes at the root of the problem for many end-time believers: “The love of the world, the love of some darling sin, has weaned the heart from the love of prayer and of meditation on sacred things. A formal round of religious services is kept up; but where is the love of Jesus? Spirituality is dying” (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 538).

One of the greatest hindrances to effective witnessing is a dying spirituality. It is hard to be an effective witness if you are losing your interest in heavenly things. It is hard to be enthusiastic about your faith if you are not experiencing Jesus in your own life.

David understood this very well. After his great sins of adultery and murder (see 2 Samuel 11), he cried out to God to restore the joy of salvation in his heart again: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You.” (Psalm 51:10-13).

David knew that until the “joy of salvation” was restored in his heart, he would never be able to “teach transgressors” in a way that would lead to their conversion. How can we persuade others of heaven’s peace and joy if our own hearts are full of guilt and anxiety over sins not forsaken?

Perhaps nothing will have a greater impact on the effectiveness of a Christian’s witness than to have the joy of salvation and a fervent love for Christ restored.

## Truth Without Spirit

Like a form of religion without the power, the Bible also warns Christians to be wary of possessing the truth without the Spirit. Throughout His teachings, Jesus emphasized the need for more than an accurate set of beliefs. He said that those who worship God “must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Without the Spirit, the truth is powerless.

Jesus illustrated this in the parable of the 10 virgins.

Read Matthew 25:1-13.

The five foolish virgins in the parable failed to bring enough oil. This oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, who empowers us to trust and obey God. Notice how Ellen White describes these believers: “The class represented by the foolish virgins are not hypocrites. They have a regard for the truth, they have advocated the truth, they are attracted to those who believe the truth; but they have not yielded themselves to the Holy Spirit’s working. . . . the class represented by the foolish virgins have been content with a superficial work. They do not know God. They have not studied His character; they have not held communion with Him; therefore they do not know how to trust, how to look and live. Their service to God degenerates into a form” (*Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 411).

How sad! The foolish virgins have even “advocated the truth,” but they “have not held communion” with God. Though they are “attracted to those who believe the truth,” their failure to yield to the Holy Spirit means that “they do not know God.” Their service has degenerated into a form.

This is a warning to us. If we fail to commune with God, our efforts to live the Christian life and to witness for Jesus can become a lifeless form.

The Lukewarm Christian

Read Revelation 3:14-22.

Here is one more end-time warning against a powerless religious experience. In this case, Jesus tells the church of Laodicea that they think they have “need of nothing” (Revelation 3:17), but they are actually “wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.” Looking good on the outside but destitute of spiritual life on the inside.

So, what does Jesus tell them to do? “I counsel you to buy from Me” (verse 18) gold, white garments, and eye salve. The key is not so much what they are told to buy, but where they must go to get it! They won’t find what they need by attending religious events, or by serving the poor, or passing out tracts—as important as these things are. “Buy from Me,” He says. The only remedy is to come to Jesus.

Notice in verse 20 that Jesus promises to “dine” with us if we will open the door to Him. But what does this mean? Notice the following description by Ellen White:

“The Lord draws out the soul in prayer and gives us to feel His precious love. We have a nearness to Him, and can hold sweet communion with Him. . . . The promises flow into the soul. Our peace is like a river, wave after wave of glory rolls into the heart, and indeed we sup with Jesus and He with us” (*Prayer*, p. 11).

Did you catch that last phrase, “we sup with Jesus and He with us”? The promise of Jesus to “dine” with us is a promise to bless our times of communion with Him. It’s a promise to fill us with joy and power that can motivate us to live and work for Him.

But it can be so easy to have a form of religion but lack the power, to have the truth but lack the Spirit, to be lukewarm Christians. And when we are lukewarm, witnessing is especially hard.

### The Source of Life and Power

Jesus used a beautiful illustration to teach us how essential our communion with Him really is. He said in John 15:5: “I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” (NKJV)

In another place, John writes that “in Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). Jesus is the source of spiritual life for everyone, and as we draw life from Him, we will bear “much fruit.” This is a wonderful promise! Whether it is personal spiritual growth, or making disciples, we will bear fruit when we abide in Christ—the source of life and power for the Christian. Without Him, we “can do nothing.” This is why Ellen White offered some very pointed counsel to Christians, emphasizing the danger of neglecting alone time with God:

“Prayer is the breath of the soul. It is the secret of spiritual power. . . . Neglect the exercise of prayer, or engage in prayer spasmodically, now and then, as seems convenient, and you lose your hold on God” (*Prayer*, p. 12).

“Satan well knows that all whom he can lead to neglect prayer and the searching of the Scriptures will be overcome by his attacks. Therefore, he invents every possible device to engross the mind” (*The Great Controversy*, p. 519).

God gives us these warnings to help us in our weakness. He knows that if we fail to commune with Him, we will be powerless to resist sin and selfishness. But if we prioritize time alone with Christ, it won't be in vain. We will see results!

“Nothing is more needed in our work than the practical results of communion with God... This will impart to the worker a power that nothing else can give. Of this power he must not allow himself to be deprived” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 512).

Do you see how communion with God not only provides for our own spiritual growth but brings “practical results” in our witness to others! Once again, we see that one of the greatest keys to making disciples is our personal communion with God.

### Hearing God's Voice

It is important to remember that communion includes more than prayer, it also involves reading and meditating on His Word. The Scriptures are more than just an historical account of what happened in the past. When we read the Bible, God still speaks to us through His Spirit in direct and personal ways. But often we fail to recognize this.

Kristin was a new Christian when she learned that Jesus' followers are the ones who "know his voice" (John 10:4). She noticed how some Christians would say "God told me this" or "God told me that". So when she prayed, she listened for His voice, but never seemed to hear it. She loved Jesus and had been impressed by the truth, but because she didn't hear God's voice she began to wonder if she was really a Christian.

You can imagine how happy Kristin was when someone shared with her these encouraging messages from Ellen White:

"The Bible is God's voice speaking to us, just as surely as though we could hear it with our ears." (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 393).

"Only he who receives the Scriptures as the voice of God speaking to himself is a true learner. He trembles at the Word; for to him it is a living reality" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 59).

Even if we never hear Jesus speak to us audibly, which in most cases we don't, we can still be familiar with His voice through His written Word! Communion with God is not a one-way communication, but a precious time through which Jesus communes with His people and impresses our hearts. The Holy Spirit speaks spiritual life into our souls and illuminates our minds with glimpses of the glory of God. In this way, every Christian can know Jesus as a personal Savior. And the motivation and power we need for witnessing is fueled by this time spent in communion with Christ.

### Making Peace With God

Now, consider the experience of Rob, a young man who had been a believer for some time. The love of Christ and the truth of eternal realities had been clearly revealed to him through the Bible. But after some time, his devotional life began to slip. When he neglected time with God, he would feel guilty and recommit himself the next time he prayed. But gradually the neglect became more frequent. Worldly attractions became stronger, and his character weaknesses became more evident in his life.

Rob began to wonder if he could ever truly overcome his many faults. He felt insincere asking for forgiveness when he didn't seem able or willing to change. He was still going to Sabbath School and church, returning tithe, and even participating in church duties—but the joy and love were dying, and everything felt like an obligation. He was losing any motivation to share his faith. Rob's life had become a form of godliness without the power. His mind was preoccupied with earthly interests. He was losing his hold on God.

Feeling empty and uncertain about his salvation, Rob began to think about the joy and peace he once had with God. He turned to the Bible for encouragement and read Isaiah 27:5: "Let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he shall make peace with Me." He longed for that peace. He remembered the story of Jacob, who wrestled with God until he was assured of His blessing (see Genesis 32:24-28). He decided to get serious about seeking God (see

Jeremiah 29:13). He started going to bed earlier so that he could get up in time to spend a thoughtful hour in prayer and devotion every day. He made his time with God the number one priority in his life. Each morning he made God his refuge and poured out all that was in his heart (see Psalm 62:8). He openly confessed his faults and failures and pleaded with God for a new heart (see Psalm 51:10).

Soon Rob felt impressed to set aside the worthless distractions that had been preoccupying his time. He became more careful in what he chose to read and watch. As he meditated on the Bible each morning, he became excited about the truth again. He started looking forward to Sabbath School and church. Throughout the day he felt stronger to resist temptation, and he experienced victory—where before he had felt helpless.

Through the power of communion with God, the joy and peace of salvation was being restored. And here's the thing—Rob **COULD NOT KEEP THE TRUTH TO HIMSELF ANYMORE**. He was on fire for God, and his passion for witnessing was rekindled.

### Our Greatest Need

The revival that Rob experienced is the greatest need in the church today: “A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work.” (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 121).

What should *you* do if you fear your Christian life and witness is more form than power? First, understand that the answer is not to put a stop to your witnessing efforts. If you wait until you are perfect to witness for Christ, you will never feel ready. Remember that there are three key components needed for your spiritual life to prosper—prayer, Bible study, and witnessing. Strengthening the first two while neglecting the third will only cause a different set of problems. It's not witnessing that needs to stop, but any habits or practices that may be separating you from God. A revival of spiritual power can be ours only when we seek it in Christ and His Word.

No matter what condition you find yourself in, the promises of God are for you. Jesus invites you, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). He promises never to turn you away: “Jesus knows the circumstances of every soul. You may say, I am sinful, very sinful. You may be; but the worse you are, the more you need Jesus. He turns no weeping, contrite one away” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 568; see also John 6:37).

Whether you have wandered far from God or simply desire more spiritual power in your life and witness, the recipe is the same: *Come to Christ, just as you are, every morning. Kneel and pray and linger in His presence. Pour out your heart before Him. Read and meditate on His Word and claim His promises.* If you don't feel in the mood, come by faith. If you don't sense an immediate change, keep coming anyway. Trust God and His Word. Let nothing prevent you from pressing close to His side.

The hope you have in God will not disappoint (see Romans 5:5). Day by day, your heart will change. You will be infused with spiritual power. The love of Christ will thrill your soul and

compel you to live for Him. You will rejoice over sins forgiven, victories gained, and “the love of the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:10). The joy of salvation will be restored to you, the power of the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and you will be His witness. You will put your discipleship into action!

Do you feel the need to press close to Jesus and to recommit to spending time alone with Him each day? Will you tell Him just now?

**Prayer:**

Heavenly Father,

We come to You today, confessing our need for Your presence and Your power. Forgive us for the times we have tried to witness without first abiding in You. Teach us to seek You daily in prayer and in Your Word, so that our hearts may overflow with the joy of salvation. Fill us with the Holy Spirit, that our words and actions may lead others to Jesus. Keep us faithful, not in form only, but in the living power of a true relationship with You. And may our lives be a clear testimony that You are real, that You save, and that You are coming soon. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Why is it important to spend time in prayer and Bible study before trying to witness? Can you think of a time when you tried to share your faith without first connecting to God? What happened?
2. In what ways can we have “a form of godliness” but lack the power? How can we tell the difference in our own lives?
3. The parable of the 10 virgins teaches us about the Holy Spirit’s role in our walk with God. What are some practical ways we can “fill our lamps” each day?
4. Rob’s story showed how personal revival leads to renewed passion for witnessing. What changes could you make this week to strengthen your connection with God and reignite your desire to share Him with others?