

## **Tell Your Story**

### **Acts 17:1-5**

#### **Introduction**

Sharing your faith and telling your story about how Christ has made a difference in your life should be a very natural thing to do. Yet, many believers feel uneasy or intimidated, so they don't speak up and share their faith with others. However, circumstances today are not unlike those the early Christians faced in the first century.

There was a great deal of hostility towards the followers of Christ, and for many, their commitment level was severely challenged. The good news is they persevered and remained true to their commitment and learned to rely upon their faith in Christ to help them deal with the many challenges they faced. Their example should encourage us to develop a witness that works in this twenty-first century as effectively as theirs did in that first century.

In some Christian circles today, there are those who say too much with too little basis for what they say! Too often, churches today depend on marketing strategies and elaborate ministry portfolios to try and keep pace with our changing world. It's tempting to put your faith in programming and methodology that becomes an end in itself. What we need is a strategic plan that connects not only people to people but people to God. We need a plan that involves developing relationships with people that brings them closer to God and teaches them the ways of God.

God is devoted to developing our character to be like His, but we must be dedicated to allowing him to do it! It is the character of Christ within us that produces the kind of work and witness that truly and accurately reflects Christ to our world. What you are and who you are in Christ is far more important than what you do. The time will come when we must be able to give an account of the hope within us. And it's important at that time that you have something to say! We must learn how to communicate our faith in Christ to others verbally.

Many people know God loves them, and they have experienced His life-changing power and presence in their lives, but to be an effective witness for Christ, we must be willing to tell others about God's love. God wants his disciples in every age to effectively reach their world with the gospel. And that requires us to share our faith and tell our own personal story of the redeeming power of Jesus Christ.

Christ is counting on you! He expects us to effectively share the message of saving faith. Jesus' disciples did it; the Apostle Paul did, and that's what Christ calls us to do in these last days. Don't be intimidated into silence. Don't buy the line that you're a fanatic for standing up for Christ. Use your voice to share the good news that Jesus can make a difference in a person's life.

There are many people in our community who are full of despair and hopelessness and are desperate to know if there's anyone who can help them. That is the very purpose and destiny for which Christ has called us.

Let's examine Paul's witness in Acts Chapter 17 to see what that looks like.

"Now, when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and, for three Sabbaths, reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ." And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas. But the Jews who were not persuaded, becoming envious, took some of the evil men from the marketplace, and gathering a mob, set all the city in an uproar and attacked the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people." (Acts 17:1-5 NKJV)

Thessalonica was founded in 315 BC by Cassandra, one of Alexander's generals and brother-in-law. He named the city after his wife, Thessaloniki. When the Romans conquered the city, it thrived as the only port on the Via Egnatia, a part of the Roman road named after the man who ordered its construction, Proconsul Gaius Egnatius, which connected ports on the Adriatic Sea with Byzantium. The Romans constructed the Via Egnatia in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. It crossed Illyricum, Macedonia, and Thrace, the territory that is now part of modern Albania, North Macedonia, Greece, and European Turkey.

Even today, Thessalonica is the second largest city in Greece after Athens. When Paul arrived in Thessalonica, he found a walled city of about 65,000 people, making it Macedonia's largest city and capital. From reading Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, it seems he must have settled in there for a while and found work. In his letter to them, Paul writes, "For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God." (1 Thessalonians 2:9 NKJV)

He congratulates the church on their "work of faith, labor of love and steadfastness of hope" and reminds them of their sinful past and how they "turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God." Let's look at Paul's approach and how his witness impacted the lives of those living in Thessalonica.

## **I. A Personal Discipline**

The first thing that leaps out at you in verse two is Paul's personal discipline. As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures. If we want to be effective in communicating our faith we must be diligent and disciplined. We must learn how to persevere and hang in there even when life gets tough.

An effective witness requires discipline and determination. We learn to hold ourselves accountable and discipline our lives to be examples of Godly character and behavior. It is our responsibility as a believer to develop good habits and Christian values that back up our witness. You cannot teach what you have not learned.

Paul lived a disciplined life and demonstrated a faith that was based upon the Word of God. He was prepared to defend the gospel of Jesus Christ when he went into the synagogues. When teaching Timothy how to be effective in ministry he writes, "Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth."

Paul had established a regular pattern of sharing his faith in Christ. I'm sure he had established regular His times of prayer, bible study and personal worship were ones that fit him. You don't have to do things the same way Paul did, but you do have to develop the same qualities.

Paul was a trained and gifted teacher. He knew his material well. He spent three years in the Arabian Desert Bible College searching out the scriptures and learning the way of Christ. Paul carefully thought through his faith and established good habits and personal discipline for his ministry.

Most of us will never rise to the stature of an Apostle Paul, but there is no reason why we can't learn to be more effective witnesses for Christ. The challenge is to establish effective disciplines that will make you a better witness for Jesus. You can do that by establishing some good habits that you can model before others:

- Read something from your bible every day. (A Psalm or a few verses from the Proverbs is a good place to start)
- Pray every day. (One or two sentence prayers to start – and just talk to God)
- Get a devotional guide and use it each day. (Just three minutes a day for devotions would revolutionize your life and our church)

There's nothing that makes your witness for Christ more convincing than when you live what you preach! So, live a balanced life! And develop some personal spiritual disciplines in your life.

## **II. Communicate the Right Message**

The second important ingredient is to understand and effectively communicate the right message. It is the nature of a believer to believe! And the more that Christ fills your life with his goodness and presence the more you find you cannot contain it and keep it to yourself. You are compelled to share the fullness of Christ within you with others!

Paul's message was simple. And so is ours! In verse 2 it says, " Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures," ([Acts 17:2 NKJV](#))

The right message can be summed up in three simple statements:

- Jesus is God's Messiah (or the Savior)
- Jesus was crucified for our sins
- Jesus did rise from the dead giving us eternal life.

The gospel is that simple.

There are people you know and meet every day who need to hear that message and be saved. Paul said he was the chiefest of sinners and God saved him. Some people need help and don't even know it! Some people know they need help but don't know how to find it. There may be a spouse who wants to save their marriage. There may be a parent who wants their child's life to be spared a killing disease. There may be a person who needs deliverance from haunting memories of their past. Others need deliverance from their fears. Someone else needs deliverance from bitterness or resentment. Some need deliverance from an addiction. Others need divine help to recover from their losses in life.

Sin has marred us all in some way and we all need God's help and salvation. But whatever your need this morning, Jesus has come down from heaven as God's savior and offered his own life on the Cross in order to save you! And the assurance of that is the resurrection! Your hope is not dead because Christ is alive and He is interceding for you this morning before Almighty God. He wants to help you. He wants to save you. That is God's eternal message of hope. Jesus wants to reach out and touch your life this morning and give you hope with his message of good news.

John Chapter 1 tells us, God came to this earth and became human in the person of Jesus Christ. And in human flesh, Jesus lived as a man. Jesus was totally man but He was also totally God. At the prime of his life he was crucified on a cross as a common criminal for the sins of the entire world.

Christ who had never committed a crime or made a mistake. He who had never sinned was made sin for us that we might be saved and restored to fellowship with the one eternal God who created us in His own image. But death could not keep Him! After three day in the tomb, the Holy Spirit quickened His spirit and he conquered death and rose from the grave ascended to the right hand of the Father to make atonement for our sins. And because of His Son, God has made us sons and daughters and we have been adopted into the family of God. That is the gospel message. It is a simple message of good news that Jesus came and died and rose again so that each of us could be restored in fellowship with the Eternal God who created us.

Because of Jesus, you can know his joy and peace. You can receive his blessing and help and experience His deliverance. God can take our warped and twisted lives and redeem and restore us completely. He deals with our sin issues and removes the guilt and shame we feel because of it.

Our behaviors and attitudes begin to change and we become a new person in Christ. It's a simple message but it makes a profound difference in your life when you embrace it! Sadly, many believers fail to share their faith because they have not developed a plan that works.

### **III. An Effective Plan**

The Apostle Paul had a plan that was effective in getting a response from his listeners. Verse 3 says that Paul was, "explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, "This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ." ([Acts 17:3 NKJV](#))

Notice that he reasoned with them. He didn't argue with them. Arguing alienates people. Reasoning disarms people and causes them to genuinely consider what you have to say. Paul challenged them to consider what he had to say. To examine it and question it. He also taught them. Sometimes the best way to help someone is to give them the right information. If they are teachable they will see the truth in what you have to say and you gain an opportunity to really help them.

Paul also used persuasion. Billy Graham said, "If you don't challenge people to make a decision they will die in their sins even having the knowledge of God, simply because they were never challenged to make a decision to accept Jesus Christ as their personal savior."

Jesus' plan includes everyone! He says that "whosoever will can come and drink of the waters of life freely." We can't sit back and wait for the perfect moment to come along. We must step out in faith and decide upon a plan that we can use to effectively communicate our love and devotion to Christ. Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you and give you boldness to witness your faith with authority and confidence.

Be honest. And be sincere. When the Pharisees question the blind man after Jesus healed him, his testimony was simple. "I can't tell you much about this Jesus, but I can tell you that once I was blind and now I see." That's an authentic and genuine witness. You don't have to be a bible scholar to be a good witness for Christ.

Just tell your story! Share your faith over a cup of coffee. Or invite a couple over to your house for a meal or just some fellowship and bring up the subject. Be creative and develop a plan to share your faith with others.

### **Conclusion**

Some people are just too passive or too afraid to take the risk. They don't want to be embarrassed or have to do something outside of their comfort zone. But what if someone's life is hanging in the balance and you're the only one who can reach them. Whenever you take the risk to share your faith one of two things will happen.

People will either accept your witness or reject it. When Paul preached, some believed and others didn't.

If you want your friends or your family to come to faith in Christ, then develop a personal discipline of Christ likeness, and then share the gospel message, but keep it simple and finally, don't leave things to chance, make a plan and ask God to help you be effective in reaching out to others.