

Witness *and* Service: The Fruit of Revival



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 28:19, 20; John 20:21; Acts 2; Acts 22:1–14; John 6:1–11; Acts 8:26–38.*

Memory Text: “You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (*Acts 1:8, NKJV*).

The purpose of revival is to fill our hearts with such a love for Jesus that we long to share this love with every person possible. In genuine revival, our own hearts are awakened to God's goodness, compassion, forgiveness, and power. We are so charmed by His love and transformed by His grace that we cannot be silent.

In contrast, a “revival” that focuses on one's “spiritual experience alone” misses the mark. If it develops attitudes critical of others who do not measure up to one's “standard of holiness,” it is certainly not heaven inspired. If the emphasis of revival is to merely change external behavior rather than to change hearts, then something is wrong.

Changed hearts lead to changed behavior. Genuine revival never leads to self-centeredness or, especially, to self-sufficiency or self-exaltation. Instead, it always leads to a selfless concern for others. When our hearts are renewed by God's grace, we long to bless and serve those who are in need. All genuine revival leads to a renewed emphasis on mission and service.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 27.*

Christ's Parting Commission and Promise

Christ did not establish His church in order for it to simply care for itself. Jesus' parting words focused upon the church's mission. Christ's intention is for His church to look beyond itself. He established it to share the light of His love and the message of His salvation with the world.

Read and summarize the following texts. How does each passage reveal Jesus' heart desire for His church?

Matt. 28:19, 20 _____

Mark 16:15 _____

Luke 24:45–49 _____

John 20:21 _____

Once Christ ascended to heaven, His church was to be a visible manifestation of His love and grace to the world. The disciples had a mission. They had a message to share. They had a task to complete. They were to carry on the work that He had begun.

“The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning it has been God’s plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency. The members of the church, those whom He has called out of darkness into His marvelous light, are to show forth His glory. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to ‘the principalities and powers in heavenly places,’ the final and full display of the love of God. Ephesians 3:10.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 9.

The burden of Jesus' heart is the salvation of the human race. The apostle Paul wrote to his young friend Timothy that it is the Savior's desire that “all . . . be saved and . . . come to the knowledge of the truth” (*1 Tim. 2:4, NKJV*). The apostle Peter adds that the Lord is “longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (*2 Pet. 3:9, NKJV*).

What in your life shows your interest in outreach to others? Or does anything show it? What does your answer tell you about yourself and your priorities?

Receiving the Promise

The mission of sharing His love and truth with the entire world must have seemed overwhelming to this small group of disciples. The challenge was enormous, the task immense. Its accomplishment in their lifetime might certainly have seemed impossible (as it can in ours). The best estimates are that the population of the Roman Empire in the first century was approximately sixty to seventy million. According to the first chapter of Acts, 120 believers met in the upper room on the day of Pentecost. This is a ratio of 1 Christian to approximately every 500,000 to 580,000 people in the empire. From a human standpoint, Jesus' command to preach the gospel to the world seemed unthinkable.

Read Acts 2. What were the results of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the mission of the early church?

The results were astounding. The Christian church exploded in growth. Tens of thousands were converted. The message of Jesus' love was carried to the remotest parts of the empire.

Pliny the Younger, governor of the Roman province of Bithynia on the northern coast of modern Turkey, wrote to Emperor Trajan around A.D. 110. Pliny described the official trials he was conducting to find and execute Christians. "Many of every age, of every social class, even of both sexes, are being called to trial and will be called. Not cities alone but villages in even rural areas have been invaded by the infection of this superstition" (Christianity).

This quote is remarkable. It reveals that in a few generations Christianity had invaded nearly every level of society, even in the remote provinces.

Ninety years later, around A.D. 200, Tertullian, a Roman lawyer turned Christian, wrote a defiant letter to the Roman magistrates defending Christianity. He boasted that "nearly all the citizens of all the cities are Christians."

The story of the book of Acts is the story of a revived church committed to witness for its Lord. Spiritual revival always leads to passionate witness. Sharing is the natural outgrowth of a transformed life. Jesus said to His disciples, " 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men' " (*Matt. 4:19*). The closer we follow Jesus, the more we care about what He cares about. If we have little interest in sharing His love with others, it may be because we are following Him at a distance and need a personal spiritual revival.

The Power of Personal Testimony

Religious ritual has little power to change lives. Religious formalism leaves people spiritually barren. Doctrine alone will not transform hearts. The power of New Testament witnessing was rooted in the genuineness of lives changed by the gospel. The disciples were not play-acting. They were not going through the motions. Theirs was not some form of artificial spirituality. An encounter with the living Christ had changed them, and they could not be silent any longer.

What common thread runs through the experiences of Paul and John that made them such powerful witnesses? Acts 22:1–14, Phil. 3:1–7, 1 John 1:1–4.

At Pentecost the disciples were changed people. Something happened to them so that the Spirit could do something through them. The Holy Spirit had done something for them so that He could do something with them. The Spirit overflowed from their lives to refresh the lives of others.

Jesus put it this way: “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water” (*John 7:38, NKJV*). The root word for “believes” in the Greek here is *πιστις*. It means much more than a superficial belief or mere intellectual assent. It is a rock-solid belief or confident trust. It is a dynamic, life-transforming faith in Christ, who poured out His life on the cross for the sins of humanity. Jesus’ point is that when His love quenches our spiritual thirst, this love flows from our hearts to the people around us.

“Our confession of His faithfulness is Heaven’s chosen agency for revealing Christ to the world. We are to acknowledge His grace as made known through the holy men of old; but that which will be most effectual is the testimony of our own experience. We are witnesses for God as we reveal in ourselves the working of a power that is divine.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 347.

The most powerful witness is one of a Christian who knows Jesus personally. There is no substitute for the testimony that springs naturally from a heart immersed in Jesus’ love.

What kind of personal testimony do you have that tells of what the Lord has done for you? How can you learn to share it better with others?

A Witnessing Faith Is a Growing Faith

Activity is a law of life. In order to be healthy, our bodies need consistent exercise. Every organ, muscle, and tissue is strengthened and invigorated through exercise. When we neglect exercise, our immune system is compromised, and we become more susceptible to disease.

Something similar happens to us spiritually when we do not exercise our faith through witnessing. The words of Jesus, that “ ‘it is more blessed to give than to receive’ ” (*Acts 20:35*), work themselves out in our own spiritual lives. When we share God’s Word with others, we grow spiritually. The more we love Jesus, the more we will desire to witness of His love. The more we witness of His love, the more we will love Him. Sharing our faith strengthens our faith.

What does Jesus’ miracle of multiplying the loaves and fishes teach us about the sharing of our faith? *John 6:1–11*.

The more that we give away our faith, the more our faith multiplies. This law of multiplication is a divine principle of spiritual life. Give and grow, or withhold and wither. Jesus increases our faith as we share it with others, even if our faith is quite small. As we share the Bread of Life with spiritually hungry people around us, Jesus multiplies in our hands, and we end up with more than we started.

When Jesus began, He had five loaves and two fish. After five thousand people were completely satisfied with their meal that day, Jesus had more left over than when He started. There were still twelve baskets remaining.

Jesus’ instructions to His New Testament church are too clear to be misunderstood. He declared, “ ‘Freely you have received, freely give’ ” (*Matt. 10:8, NKJV*). Witnessing is the gentle breeze that fans the sparks of revival into Pentecostal flames. When witness and service do not accompany a revival of prayer and Bible study, the flames of revival are extinguished, and the embers soon grow cold.

It’s true, isn’t it? The more that we witness, the more our faith grows. What has been your own experience with this crucial spiritual truth?

Revival, Witnessing, and Divine Intervention

The thrilling story of the rapid growth of New Testament Christianity in Acts is the story of a revived church witnessing of Jesus' love. It is the story of a church that regularly experienced divine intervention. Witnessing was a way of life for these early believers.

“Daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ” (*Acts 5:42, NKJV*). Persecution even furthered the cause of the gospel. When persecution scattered the members of the church at Jerusalem, they “went everywhere preaching the word” (*Acts 8:4, NKJV*).

One of the more remarkable examples of divine intervention in Acts is the story of Philip and an Ethiopian government official.

Read the story of Philip instructing the Ethiopian and his response in Acts 8:26–38. What can we take from this story about revival and witnessing?

“An angel guided Philip to the one who was seeking for light and who was ready to receive the gospel, and today angels will guide the footsteps of those workers who will allow the Holy Spirit to sanctify their tongues and refine and ennoble their hearts. The angel sent to Philip could himself have done the work for the Ethiopian, but this is not God’s way of working. It is His plan that men are to work for their fellow men.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 109.

There are three essential elements in revival, and they are prayer, the study of God’s Word, and witnessing. When God’s people seek Him in earnest, heartfelt intercession, and when they saturate their minds with the truths of His Word, and when they passionately witness of His love and truth to others—God divinely intervenes and opens unusual doors for the proclamation of truth.

Be honest with yourself: what do you do when witnessing opportunities come? Do you witness, or do you find some excuse not to? What does your answer tell you about your own need of revival and reformation?

Further Study: “In His wisdom the Lord brings those who are seeking for truth into touch with fellow beings who know the truth. It is the plan of Heaven that those who have received light shall impart it to those in darkness. Humanity, drawing its efficiency from the great Source of wisdom, is made the instrumentality, the working agency, through which the gospel exercises its transforming power on mind and heart.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 134.

“God could have reached His object in saving sinners without our aid; but in order for us to develop a character like Christ’s, we must share in His work. In order to enter into His joy,—the joy of seeing souls redeemed by His sacrifice,—we must participate in His labors for their redemption.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 142.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What is the main idea of this week’s lesson? Are there changes that God is calling you to make in your life? Do your priorities need to be readjusted in any way? What actions might God be calling you to take?
- 2 Dwell more on this amazing spiritual truth that the more we witness for our faith the more our faith grows. Why do you think this is true? Why does this principle make so much sense?
- 3 How often do you witness for your Jesus? If not a lot, ask yourself, Why not? Are you afraid of rejection? If so, think about Jesus and how often He was rejected. If rejection didn’t deter Him, it shouldn’t us. Or do you fail to witness because you are not sure of what to say? If so, what does that tell you about your need for a deeper walk with the Lord?
- 4 During the week we talked a bit about how religious ritual alone cannot bring about a change of the heart. That is so true. At the same time, what is the place of ritual and tradition in our faith and church? In what ways, if any, can ritual and tradition be of value in revival and reformation?
- 5 Why do we get so much satisfaction from being used by God to reach souls for Him?

Zuri's Hope

Zuri, ten, lives in a village in the mountains of central Mexico. The villagers work hard every day. But on festival days, they put aside work and eat and drink and dance and laugh. But Zuri didn't like the festivals. Often the men would get drunk and would fight. Often someone got hurt. Zuri told his father how much he hated the noise and fighting and drinking during the festivals.

"But what can we do?" his father asked. "We live here."

"We could go to the [Seventh-day] Adventist church on festival days," Zuri suggested. "They play games, and everyone has fun, but no one drinks or gets hurt. It's nice."

"How do you know that?" Zuri's father asked.

"I've seen them," Zuri said. Zuri didn't tell his father that he had gone to the church and listened to them sing or gone to the river to watch them hold baptisms.

Father respected Seventh-day Adventists and gave Zuri permission to attend the Seventh-day Adventist church. The next Sabbath Zuri went to Sabbath School. He enjoyed the children's program and decided to go every week. He went to weeknight programs, too, and enjoyed sitting in the front row where he could watch the musicians play their guitars and sing.

When the church planned a social, Zuri invited his parents to attend. They went and enjoyed it. Then he invited them to church, and they went. They were pleased to see how well church members treated Zuri.

One day the pastor announced a baptism. Zuri asked the pastor if he could be baptized. The pastor said that anyone who loves Jesus and wants to follow Him can be baptized. Zuri ran home and told his parents what the pastor had said. They gave Zuri permission to be baptized.

Zuri studied the Bible with the pastor and learned what God expects His followers to do. Zuri eagerly accepted God's instructions and asked to be baptized.

On the day of the baptism Zuri hurried to the river. Often he had stood on the bank and watched others be baptized. This day his parents stood on the bank and watched him be baptized.

Zuri taught his parents what he had learned about following Christ. A few months later Zuri stood once more on the riverbank to watch his parents be baptized.

Today when the village holds festivals, Zuri's family spends the day with their Seventh-day Adventist church family. They invite others to join them, and the church is growing.

Our Thirteenth Sabbath Offerings have helped to build churches and training camps in central Mexico where more people can learn what it means to join God's family.