

YOU WILL BE MY WITNESSES

“Filled with the Spirit”

by Mike Brooks

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Perhaps you’ve been there. You’re at the birthday celebration of a child, and she’s holding up her new toy triumphantly, moments away from ripping open the packaging. Then the thought etches across the mind of an unwitting parent: I wonder if it came with batteries or if I needed to buy them separately. In one fell swoop, the packaging disappears, buttons are pressed, and reality sets in. The summer’s hottest new toy is reduced to a hunk of plastic, tossed in the corner and in need of Triple-A-sized help.

We’re regularly reminded in this life of our own great need for help. Whether in the workplace, on campus, at home, or in our neighborhoods—the demands of this life are often more than we are capable of handling on our own. This is certainly true of the Christian life as well. Thankfully, as believers, we are well-resourced to carry out all that God has purposed for us to do. Yet, over and over again, we are reminded that this miraculous assistance is not the result of our own cunning or human effort. Rather, it is the work of the Holy Spirit, who works powerfully in and through our lives toward God’s intended purposes.

THERE’S NO SUCH THING AS ROGUE CHRISTIANITY

Before His ascension to heaven, Jesus left His disciples specific instructions to follow as they awaited His eventual return. “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations,” He told them, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20a). On its face, the task seems daunting. Engaging in a global effort to proclaim the gospel and help others become devoted followers of Christ is not for the faint of heart.

But Jesus reminded His followers that they did not have to engage in the work alone. He reminded the disciples that He has all authority and He promised to be with them (Matt. 28:20b). Specifically, Jesus promised the disciples the Holy Spirit would come upon them to sustain them for the great missionary task ahead (Acts 1:8).

Today, as believers, we lay hold to the same mission as those early disciples and we are given the same help along the way. The New Testament picture of a Christian engaged in the mission of Christ is not that of an individual bearing the weight and responsibility of the

work alone. The same Spirit dwelling in and with Jesus's followers in the book of Acts continues to dwell inside of us (1 Cor. 3:16). The Holy Spirit guides, comforts, and empowers followers of Jesus as we seek to faithfully obey God's will. As those united now to Christ by faith, we are now direct beneficiaries of the Spirit's magnificent power and His faithful presence.

WE NEED THE SPIRIT'S POWER

Because we are incapable of saving ourselves, the Holy Spirit's work in our salvation is vital. In the work of salvation, the Spirit applies to our lives all that Christ has accomplished in and through His perfect life, His sacrificial death, and His resurrection. We become aware of and increasingly convicted over our sinful state as a result of the Spirit's work in our lives (John 16:8-11). The Spirit leads us to true repentance and brings about our new birth through the miraculous work of regeneration (3:3-5). In addition to being washed clean, we have right-standing (justification) and are being made holy (sanctification) as a result of the Spirit's powerful work in our lives.

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The Spirit is at work in other ways too. The Holy Spirit is ever at work in the lives of believers, guiding and empowering us to fulfill God's will for our lives individually and together. In Scripture, we see the Spirit's work is as multi-faceted as it is miraculous. The Spirit supplies the power needed to (a) overcome sin, (b) reveal truth found in God's Word, (c) walk in faithfulness and freedom, (d) discern the will of God, and (e) help us use our spiritual gifts for the spread of the gospel and the building up of the body of Christ.

WE RELY ON THE SPIRIT'S PRESENCE

As believers, we experience not only the Holy Spirit's power but His presence as we seek to live according to the truth we have found in Jesus. The Spirit indwells believers and is given as a deposit both as a source of power and as surety for the eternal promises of God in salvation. The Spirit is a helper, sent for the purposes of teaching and reminding believers of Jesus's instructions (John 14:26). The Spirit is a blessed source of comfort amid various trials (Acts 9:31) and He intercedes for us in prayer when our thoughts are inexpressible (Rom. 8:26).

There is no question: remaining aware of the Spirit's power and presence in our lives isn't always easy. Human beings have a remarkable tendency to return to the well-worn paths of self-governance and self-determination. Yet, the essence of our new identity as those saved and redeemed by God runs against the grain of all our more natural, self-centered impulses.

Because of the high calling placed on our lives, even a seasoned Christian will feel inadequate for the task at hand. Understanding that salvation itself is a gift from God, and not a work of our own doing, bears witness to the fact that maturity and growth in our Christian walk is the powerful work of the Spirit as well. What is more, beyond the Spirit's work in our own lives, we also rely on the Spirit's power and presence in the lives of those who do not yet believe. Because we have been saved by the work of God, we seek to fulfill our mission of sharing the gospel—trusting not in our own power, but rather in the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit to change the lives of others.



THE COMMISSION RECEIVED

+ SESSION OUTLINE

1. Jesus's disciples rely on the power of the Spirit (Acts 1:4-5).
2. Jesus's disciples fulfill the mission of the Father (Acts 1:6-8).
3. Jesus's disciples anticipate the return of the Son (Acts 1:9-11).

Background Passage: Acts 1

+ WHAT WILL MY GROUP LEARN?

Jesus's disciples were to carry out their mission of telling the world about Him, a mission they could only fulfill through the power of the Holy Spirit.

+ HOW WILL MY GROUP SEE CHRIST?

Before Jesus ascended to the Father, He commissioned His disciples to go into the world and make disciples of all nations. Under the authority of Jesus, and with the power of the Holy Spirit, we make disciples of all peoples as we anticipate the return of Christ.

+ HOW SHOULD MY GROUP RESPOND?

Because we have been saved as a result of the Son of God coming to us, we go and make disciples of all nations by declaring the truth of the gospel with the power of the Holy Spirit through our words and actions.

GROUP TIME

Group content found in the Daily Discipleship Guide is included in the shaded areas throughout the session.



SCRIPTURE HANDOUT

Scan this QR code for a reproducible handout of this session's Scripture passages.



INTRODUCTION

ASK: As participants arrive, ask: **What is the most important challenge you have ever been tasked with?** (getting married; becoming a parent; joining the armed services; going to college)

TRANSITION: In our passage today, we will discover a significant challenge that all followers of Jesus have been given. It is a task of great importance and difficulty, which requires the presence of God's Spirit in our lives to fulfill it. This task is incredibly important to God, and yet He has entrusted and enlisted us as disciples to participate in His work of redeeming sinners from all nations. Our willingness and obedience to be witnesses of Christ is vital to this mission.

SUMMARIZE: Help your group understand the **setting** for this session.

- Acts picks up where the Gospel of Luke ends. After Jesus's resurrection, He spent forty days with His disciples, teaching them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). He did this to prepare them for life and ministry in His physical absence. The disciples were nervous and anxious about the next phase of their lives and ministry, but Jesus gathered them, commissioned them, and assured them of the promise of the Holy Spirit and His physical return.



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POINT 1

JESUS'S DISCIPLES RELY ON THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT (ACTS 1:4-5).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 1:4-5** from his or her Bible.

4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; **5** for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

EXPLAIN: Using the bulleted points, explain **verse 4** as you discuss the following (Daily Discipleship Guide [DDG] p. 58):

In some of His last words, Jesus reminded the disciples of the promise and blessing of the Holy Spirit.

- Jesus would send His disciples to the ends of the earth, but first, they needed to wait and be adequately equipped. The disciples may have wanted to give up in disappointment at Christ's leaving or go ahead in excitement, but Jesus commanded them to wait. Obedience to the Lord's commands and waiting on the Lord's timing allows us to experience His blessings.
- Jesus previously taught His disciples about the coming of the Spirit in His physical absence (see John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7-15). He taught that: (1) the Spirit will be our Helper (14:26); (2) the Spirit will bring to remembrance Jesus's teachings (14:26); (3) the Spirit will guide us in truth (14:17; cf. 15:26; 16:13); and (4) the Spirit will bring the testimony of Christ to us and through us (15:26). These teachings lay the foundation for the disciples to anticipate the “Father's promise” of the Holy Spirit in Acts 1:4.

DISCUSS: As a group, discuss the following question (DDG p. 58).

How do you see the Holy Spirit as a promised blessing in the life of a believer? (He guides believers in God's paths; He reminds His people of God's daily presence; He reminds us of our sealed inheritance)

LIST: On a dry erase board, ask the group to help you make a list to compare and contrast how John's baptism—a water baptism—and the baptism of the Spirit are similar and different (John's baptism was with water, Christ's with the Holy Spirit; John's was an act of repentance on the part of the individual, Christ's was an act of sealing our adoption because of the forgiveness of sins through the work of Christ and the power of the Spirit; John's was a symbolic cleansing, Christ's was a real cleansing).

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Certainly we must never conceive ‘salvation’ in purely negative terms, as if it consisted only of our rescue from sin, guilt, wrath and death. We thank God that it is all these things. But it also includes the positive blessing of the Holy Spirit to regenerate, indwell, liberate and transform us. What a truncated gospel we preach if we proclaim the one without the other! And what a glorious gospel we have to share when we are true to Scripture! When sinners repent and believe, Jesus not only takes away their sins but also baptizes them with his Spirit.”¹

—John Stott (1921–2011)

HIGHLIGHT: Refer to **verse 5** and the bulleted points to highlight this truth (DDG p. 58):

Because of Jesus and the Father's promise, believers are baptized with the Holy Spirit.

- John's baptism was a symbol representing the individual's repentance from sin, God's forgiveness, and a hope in God's promise to bring restoration through a Messiah. The immersion into water represented ceremonial cleansing that served as a personal identification and reminder of their hope in God to fulfill His promise.
- The baptism of the Holy Spirit referenced here would be a unique event when the Holy Spirit would be poured out on the disciples (Acts 2:3). While John's baptism was an immersion into the water as a sign of repentance, the baptism of the Spirit at Pentecost was the Spirit immersing the disciples as He came to live within them.
- Once the Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, He was made available to all believers upon their conversion (Acts 11:44-47; 2 Cor. 1:21-22; Eph. 1:13-14).

ASK: (DDG p. 58)

From Day 2 in the DDG: **How should the awareness of the Holy Spirit being in your life impact your daily life and relationship with God?** (I can be more confident in obeying God and sharing the good news with others; I can feel assured that God guides me in my decisions and prompts me toward good works; I can feel His presence; I can know I can talk to Him at any time)

TRANSITION: The Holy Spirit is given to Christ followers so they may grow in Christ, serve Him with spiritual gifts, and be empowered to live holy lives that point others to Jesus. Christ's disciples must rely on the Spirit of God for faithfulness and fruitfulness. Disciples are unable to effectively carry out Christ's work in their own strength and resources.

POINT 2

JESUS'S DISCIPLES FULFILL THE MISSION OF THE FATHER (ACTS 1:6-8).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 1:6-8** from his or her Bible.

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" **7** He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

ASK: Christ preparing to leave was a very emotionally intense moment for the disciples. Now that He was leaving soon, the disciples still held on to the expectation that the kingdom of Israel would be restored. In pairs, answer the question "What are some expectations someone might have of Christ today?" (give me a stress-free life; make everything perfect; fix everything; erase all evil on the earth; give me a rich life)

EXPLAIN: Use the bulleted points below to explain the following main point as seen in **verses 6-7** (DDG p. 58):

The disciples had hopes for Israel, but Christ shifted their focus to the Father's greater plan for the nations.

- The disciples' question concerning the restoration of Israel followed the common teaching of the time that God's Messiah would come to restore the national identity and rule of Israel.
- While Jesus did not deny that there would be a future restoration, He turned the disciples' attention to consider God's greater plan.
- A primary implication of verse 7 is that we should not seek to figure out the date or believe any group or person that promotes a certain date for Christ's return. Church history is full of such false predictions, and Jesus made it clear that such knowledge of God's plan will not be revealed. Instead, we are to live each day faithfully and mindfully with the hope that it could be the day God has set for Christ's return (Matt. 24:44).

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 58)

Why was it important for Christ to refocus the disciples' attention from the restoration of Israel to the Father's ultimate plan? (so they would understand God's greater plan of salvation to all nations; so that they would be engaged, active witnesses, not passive observers waiting for God to act; so that they would be obedient witnesses, understanding the urgency needed)

COMPARE: Ask a group member to read Matthew’s account of the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20). Ask the group, “How do Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8 lay out a similar purpose and plan for the disciples?” (both require the disciples to depend on the Holy Spirit; both focused on going beyond geographically; both centered on the disciples as witnesses of Christ to others)

HIGHLIGHT: Call attention to **PACK ITEM 8: PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT** and use **verse 8** to connect to the doctrine below (DDG p. 58).

Key Doctrine #85: Mission of the Church: The church is a sign and instrument of the kingdom of God, a people united by faith in the gospel announcement of the crucified and risen King Jesus. The mission of the church is to go into the world in the power of the Spirit and make disciples by proclaiming this gospel, calling people to respond in ongoing repentance and faith, and demonstrating the truth and power of the gospel by living under the lordship of Christ for the glory of God and the good of the world.

- Jesus would use the disciples to expand the kingdom by bringing a Spirit-empowered witness of Jesus Christ to other places and cultures. God’s plan was a much greater plan than what they anticipated and would involve their active participation in achieving it.
- The Holy Spirit working in the disciples would enable them to have the power to fulfill their task of being Jesus’s witnesses.
- The advancement of the disciples’ gospel witness from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth could similarly be understood today as taking the gospel to people who are like you, somewhat different from you, significantly different from you, and extremely different from you. The progression is not only geographic but also cultural.
- The geographic and cultural progression of the disciples’ ministry provides a rough outline of the book of Acts as they went from Jerusalem (ch. 1–7) to Judea and Samaria (ch. 8–12), and finally to the ends of the earth (ch. 13–28). Our task today is to continue this Spirit-empowered task of being Christ’s witnesses to all people everywhere.

DISCUSS: (DDG p. 59)

Do you think the first disciples completed this commission and why? (yes and no; Acts shows how these disciples took the gospel witness of Christ to the places listed, but it wasn’t exhaustive—it wasn’t meant to be; there are still people who have not heard the gospel message; this commission to be a witness for Christ is for all believers through all time until the Father’s time for Christ’s return)

TRANSITION: Christ promised the arrival of the Spirit, and He was sure to come. But first, Jesus had to return to the Father.



POINT 3

JESUS'S DISCIPLES ANTICIPATE THE RETURN OF THE SON (ACTS 1:9-11).

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud **Acts 1:9-11** from his or her Bible.

9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. **10** And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, **11** and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

ILLUSTRATE: Ask if anyone has ever seen a rocket launch in person or on video. The picture painted in **verse 9** of the disciples watching Jesus ascending to heaven may have been similar. Use **PACK ITEM 2: JESUS'S FINAL DAYS MAP** to highlight where Jesus visibly rose to the heavens. Near the Mount of Olives, the disciples watched until they could no longer see Him because of the clouds.

EXPLAIN: Using **verse 9**, explain the following main idea (DDG p. 59):

After commissioning the disciples and providing them with all they needed to accomplish that commission, Jesus ascended to heaven.

- Christ's ascension completed His physical ministry to the disciples until His return. Although Christ had physically returned to the Father, He revealed Himself to Stephen (Acts 7:56) and in visions to Paul (9:5) and John (Rev. 1:12-19).
- *Optional:* The ascension of Christ is reminiscent of Enoch (Gen. 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:11-12) whom God took to heaven. The difference, however, is that Jesus died, resurrected, then was taken to heaven, as well as the fact that Jesus's ascension to heaven anticipates His future physical return.

ASK: (DDG p. 59)

In John 14:1-7, the disciples were distraught at the thought of Christ leaving. Why do they now seem composed in Acts as He returned to the Father? (Christ explained that His departure was for their benefit; they knew that the Spirit was coming soon; they realized that He must leave in order to return; their confidence and trust in Jesus had increased since His resurrection)

REFLECT: Tony Evans took the well-known quote from Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., and flipped it on its head: "If you are a Christian who has become so heavenly minded you are no earthly good, you have missed it. The whole point of being heavenly minded is so that you can be of some earthly good."² **Verses 10-11** illustrate that point.



HIGHLIGHT: Use **PACK ITEM 9: JESUS'S EXALTATION** to highlight a believer's response to Christ's exaltation. Ask: "Which item in the fourth column, 'Respond in Worship and Mission,' is most difficult for you to do?" Ask for volunteers to answer the question.

INSTRUCT: Understanding Christ's exaltation, continue to use **verses 10-11** to explain the truth below (DDG p. 59):

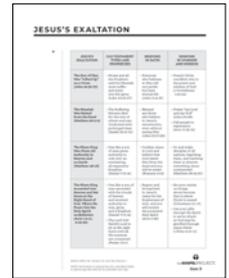
Christ's disciples must wait for His return by carrying out His commission to take the gospel to all people.

- As Christ vanished from view, the disciples' gaze to the sky lingered on. They were understandably mesmerized, having witnessed the miracle of Christ's ascension. However, such high spiritual experiences should be motivation for faithfulness, not idleness.
- The two men who appeared were most likely angels, given their sudden appearance, white clothing (as seen in other angelic appearances), and insight into what had taken place. Like the angels who appeared at Christ's tomb to explain the event and encourage the women to go tell the others (Luke 24:4-9), these messengers reminded the disciples of Christ's promise to return and refocused their attention to the task at hand.
- The return of Christ will be physical, where He will come down from the heavens. The messengers explained that Christ will come back similarly to how He left. Other New Testament passages confirm this idea of Christ's return on the clouds (Rev. 1:7) and His descent from heaven to earth (1 Thess. 4:16). All Christians look forward to the return of Christ as the day of the "blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

ASK: (DDG p. 59)

How should our anticipation for Christ's return motivate our activity to be His witnesses? (God's timing for the return of Christ is connected with our efforts to be His witnesses; we want to be found faithful and obedient to His command when He returns; there are still people who need to hear and believe the gospel and we want them to come to faith before it is too late)

TRANSITION: The sudden appearance and message from the angels to the disciples is a reminder to all believers that we should anticipate Christ's return. But while waiting and anticipating, we should be active to fulfill our commission to be Jesus's witnesses to all people in all places as Christ commanded.



MY RESPONSE

SAY: Before Jesus ascended to the Father, He commissioned His disciples to go into the world and make disciples of all nations. Under the authority of Jesus, and with the power of the Holy Spirit, we make disciples of all peoples as we anticipate the return of Christ. Because we have been saved as a result of the Son of God coming to us, we go and make disciples of all nations by declaring the truth of the gospel with the power of the Holy Spirit through our words and actions.

HEAD:

The good news of salvation available through faith in Christ alone has come to us so that we might pass it on to others. We must now consider ourselves commissioned by the Savior to go in the power of the Spirit and be Christ's witnesses near and far. As we anticipate the return of Christ, we should be motivated to see the gospel message go throughout the nations.

How would taking on the responsibility to be a witness for Christ influence your daily decisions and actions?

HEART:

Christ's commission to be His witnesses to all people should spark a desire in us to see the gospel of Jesus go to all people. It should shape our compassion toward other nationalities, cultures, and people groups as we see them as people made in God's image and who may be redeemed by the gospel just as we have been. But many of us get too busy, lazy, or distracted.

What are the distractions in your life that prevent you from prioritizing or obeying Christ's commission that you need to confess?

HANDS:

Christ's commission to His followers requires action. We should seek to reach those close to us with the gospel as well as be involved in the gospel work of those serving throughout the world. The task requires all Christians to pray, give, and/or go so that the good news of salvation through Jesus would be heard across the street and across the world.

What are ways you can be involved personally and cooperatively with others to see the gospel go to all people everywhere?

PRAY: Lord, we wait for Your return. Help us be diligent in fulfilling Your mission as we wait. Fill us with Your Spirit to lead us to make disciples that all people may learn of Your love, grace, and forgiveness. You are our hope and salvation! Amen.

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Jesus' commission to evangelize the world was not a suggestion to be considered but a command to be obeyed. Jesus' followers did not consider this Great Commission to evangelize the world as an option to entertain but rather saw it as a mandate to fulfill whatever the cost."³

—Dave Earley

POINT 1: JESUS'S DISCIPLES RELY ON THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT (ACTS 1:4-5).

+ COMMENTARY

“The Old Testament prophets announced the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in connection with the new covenant. Isaiah 32:15 looks forward to a time when ‘the spirit is poured upon us from on high.’ God says through Ezekiel that, ‘I will put my spirit in you’ (Ezekiel 37:14; cf. 36:27). On the day of Pentecost, Peter specifically connected the outpouring of the Spirit with the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32. Jesus gave his most extensive teaching about the coming of the Holy Spirit to his disciples the night before he was crucified (John 14-16).”⁴

+ ADDITIONAL TEACHING RESOURCE

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is a topic that is often debated in the church today. While Christians may differ in their teachings and practices regarding how the Spirit works in the church today, we must remember that the Holy Spirit is an essential part of the Christian faith.

- **The Holy Spirit is the presence of God in our lives:** When we become Christians, we receive the Holy Spirit as a gift from God. The Holy Spirit is God’s presence within us, and it is through the Holy Spirit that we can have a personal relationship with God. Therefore, considering the Holy Spirit in our lives helps us cultivate a deeper sense of God’s presence and experience His love, peace, and joy (John 14:16-17).
- **The Holy Spirit guides and directs us:** The Holy Spirit is our guide and counselor, and it is through the Holy Spirit that we can discern God’s will for our lives. By considering the Holy Spirit in our decision-making and seeking His guidance, we can make choices that align with God’s plan for us and lead us to greater fulfillment and purpose (John 16:13; Rom. 8:14).
- **The Holy Spirit empowers us for ministry:** The Holy Spirit gives us the gifts and abilities we need to serve God and others. By considering the Holy Spirit in our lives and being open to His leading, we can discover our unique gifts and use them to build up the church and share the gospel with others (1 Cor. 12:7-11).
- **The Holy Spirit produces spiritual fruit in our lives:** Spiritual fruit such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are the result of the Holy Spirit in our lives (Gal. 5:22-23). By considering the Holy Spirit in our lives and allowing Him to work in us, we can grow in these virtues and become more like Christ.

EXTRA

POINT 2: JESUS'S DISCIPLES FULFILL THE MISSION OF THE FATHER (ACTS 1:6-8).

+ COMMENTARY

“To be a witness for Christ is to bring a message that is a marvel of simplicity: Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh; he died to pay for our sins; he was resurrected; now he is exalted in Heaven; he calls us to believe in him and so receive forgiveness of sins. This is good news. There is nothing to join, no system to climb—just a person to receive and, in him, eternal life. Though this witness is simple, it requires costly commitment from its carriers. It radically touches our inner complexities—who we are deep inside. Not only must we have the message, the logos, the Word, but we must also attract the magnificent compliment that Sir Henry Stanley gave David Livingstone after discovering and spending time with him in Central Africa: ‘If I had been with him any longer, I would have been compelled to be a Christian, and he never spoke to me about it at all.’ Livingstone’s witness went far beyond mere words.”⁵

+ ADDITIONAL TEACHING RESOURCE

What does it look like to be a witness of Christ? Consider a few examples from the Bible.

- In the book of Acts, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, preached to the crowds in Jerusalem, telling them about Jesus and calling them to repent and be baptized. Through his boldness and willingness to speak the truth, many people came to believe in Jesus.
- Paul, a former persecutor, traveled extensively throughout the Roman Empire, sharing the gospel with both Jews and Gentiles. He endured persecution, imprisonment, and even shipwreck in order to spread the message of Christ. Through his teaching and writing, Paul left a lasting legacy of faith and devotion to Jesus.
- In John 4, a woman from Samaria met Jesus at a well. He told her about living water, and she believed that He was the Messiah. She went back to her village and told everyone about Jesus, and many of them believed in Him as well.
- In Acts 6–7, Stephen preached a powerful sermon to an angry mob of religious leaders, accusing them of rejecting God’s messengers throughout history. As a result, he was stoned to death. Despite the violence done to him, Stephen inspired others to stand firm in their faith and continue to spread the gospel.

The New Testament provides many examples of what it means to be a witness for Christ. Their examples serve as an inspiration to us today, reminding us that being a witness for Christ involves not just words but also actions and a willingness to live out our faith in a way that points others toward Jesus.

POINT 3: JESUS'S DISCIPLES ANTICIPATE THE RETURN OF THE SON (ACTS 1:9-11).

+ COMMENTARY

“The angels implied, until Christ comes again, the apostles must get on with their witness, for that was their mandate. There was something fundamentally anomalous about their gazing up into the sky when they had been commissioned to go to the ends of the earth. It was the earth not the sky which was to be their preoccupation. Their calling was to be witnesses not stargazers. The vision they were to cultivate was not upwards in nostalgia to the heaven which had received Jesus, but outwards in compassion to a lost world which needed him. It is the same for us. Curiosity about heaven and its occupants, speculation about prophecy and its fulfilment, an obsession with ‘times and seasons’—these are aberrations which distract us from our God-given mission. Christ will come personally, visibly, gloriously. Of that we have been assured. Other details can wait. Meanwhile, we have work to do in the power of the Spirit.”⁶

+ ILLUSTRATION

A lot of children are easily distracted, and it's difficult for them to stay focused on a task due to distractions and a lack of impulse control. Often minor details can take over and cause them to lose sight of the main goal or objective. You might send a middle schooler into a grocery store to buy bread, telling them to make sure they get back the right change, and they come out with a bag of chips, but with the right change.

Similarly, in the Christian life, we can become distracted by minor details and lose sight of the main goal of following Christ. We can become so caught up in doctrine and practices of our faith that we forget about the more important aspects of living a Christ-centered life seeking to fulfill Christ's commission for us to be His witnesses to the world.

One way we can easily be distracted from Christ's commission is by becoming overly focused on external religious practices. Jesus criticized the Pharisees and scribes for this very thing (Matt. 23:23). The Pharisees were so concerned with external practices that they forgot about the more important matters of living justly, showing mercy, and being faithful to God. They lost sight of what truly mattered in their relationship with God and others. Similarly, in our own lives, we can get caught up in minor details of religious practice and doctrine and become distracted from seeking to fulfill the commission Christ has assigned us to be His witnesses through the power of the Spirit.

References

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4. Clinton E. Arnold, *Acts*, vol. 2B, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 8.
5. R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 16.
6. John Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church & the World, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 50–51.