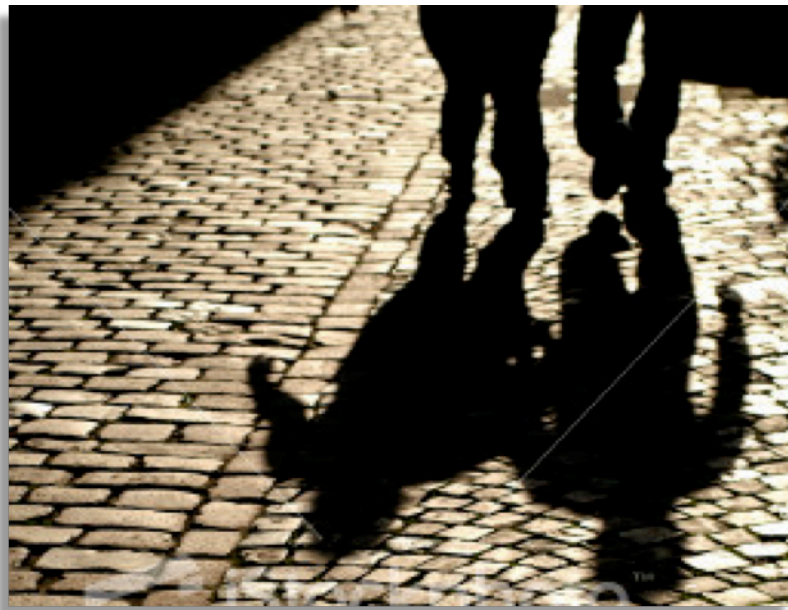


THE CONFIDENT WITNESS

Mission Partners Study 6



T. M. MOORE

The Fellowship of Ailbe



The Confident Witness
Mission Partners Study 6
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Welcome to *The Confident Witness*

Welcome to the last in our series of Mission Partners Studies, *The Confident Witness*. The six studies in this series include:

Sent like Jesus – If we really want to live, we have to live like Jesus.

To Fill All Things – Jesus Christ through you to your world!

Seasoned with Grace – Talking with others about the grace of God.

Lived Truth – Our mission begins with *being* witnesses for Christ.

Redeeming Culture – We can't avoid or escape culture, so we need to transform it.

Confident Witness – How to be bolder and more effective in sharing your faith.

Every believer would like to have confidence to work his or her Personal Mission Field consistently and effectively as a witness for Jesus Christ. This final study will review much of the work we have done throughout this Mission Partners project, and show us how we can continue working and expanding our Personal Mission Fields in the days to come.

The Mission Partners program is designed to help you understand and make the best use of those daily disciplines that can allow you to follow Jesus with into more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God.

Here are the assignments for Month 6 of your Mission Partners project:

Video: Personal Mission Field for Life

Study: *Confident Witness*

- Tasks:
1. Pray daily for the people you will see in your PMF that day.
 2. Initiate or continue conversations with people in your PMF; be yourself!
 3. Pray through your testimony and the Gospel at least weekly.
 4. Talk with your Mission Partner about the progress you've made in your PMF.

These studies are designed for use with a Mission Partner. For more information on the Mission Partners program, visit our website, www.ailbe.org.

We're pleased to offer the Mission Partners program, and the studies that go with it, at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe. Information on how to contribute to The Fellowship of Ailbe can be found at the end of this study.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Know the Lord

For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. 2 Timothy 1.12

A true Christian hero

Perhaps for many of us, the Apostle Paul stands out as one of the true heroes of the Christian movement.

Here is a man who, first of all, was not a likely candidate to *become* a Christian, so strong was his hatred of those who believed in Jesus. And then, after becoming a Christian, he was not likely to *succeed* as one. Almost no one trusted him; they all thought he was pulling some scam to get closer to the centers of Christian power, so he could ravage the Church at its heart.

Then, when he finally began his ministry, he was opposed by the enemies of the Gospel, and even some who claimed to be its friends. Everywhere Paul went he was harassed, beaten, imprisoned, denounced, and derided. Then, whenever he moved on in his mission, false apostles came into town after him and tried to pick off his converts for allegiance to a false gospel.

But in spite of all this, Paul could say that he had not labored in vain; he indeed bore much fruit for the Lord, and the many churches he founded were the result of his faithful, confident witness for Christ.

The need of the moment

Paul was able to accomplish great things against great odds because he had such great confidence in his message and his Lord.

In our day the work of evangelism has ground almost to a halt. Few and far between are the pastors and lay people who are actively involved in bringing the Good News to lost people wherever they can. Are we *ashamed* of the Gospel, or simply afraid to talk about the Lord in public? We're content these days to let the lost find their way to us, if they're so inclined. And in order to help them be so inclined, we've pretty much "re-culturized" our churches so that they are more a pale reflection of the pop and entertainment culture of the day than the temples and dwelling places of the Lord they're supposed to be.

We seem to have lost sight of our calling as witnesses for Christ and of our mission to make disciples "as we are going" through the normal course of our everyday lives. Where are the confident and effective witnesses, like the Apostle Paul, among this generation of Christians?

In this series we're going to take a look at Paul, to see what we can learn from him about recovering our proper callings and becoming confident witnesses for the Lord.

Begin here

And it all begins with the nature of our relationship with the Lord. Toward the end of his life Paul could say, "I know whom I have believed." Today most people who claim to be Christians will say "I believe" in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. But can we say that we "know" Him in the way that, it is apparent, the Apostle Paul *knew* the Lord Jesus Christ?

Paul's knowledge of Christ was no mere intellectual exercise. It took the form of fear, obedience, love, and trust, and it was so intimate and real that Paul could rejoice in, as he said, looking into the very face of our Lord Jesus Christ, there to discover the radiant glory of God (2 Cor. 4.6).

Paul *feared* Jesus. We see that from the beginning, as the Lord confronted him on that Damascus road. Struck blind and knocked to the ground, Paul could only ask, “Who are You, Lord?” The fear of the Lord drove Paul to work out his salvation with great trembling, seeking daily to bring holiness to completion (Phil. 2.12; 2 Cor. 7.1). Paul’s fear of Jesus led him to *obey* the Lord in every detail, going where the Lord sent him and doing whatever was required of him, every day of his life. The privilege of being forgiven, saved, sustained, and sent by Jesus led Paul to *love* Jesus. He said the love he had for Jesus *constrained* him to obey the Lord and do the work of evangelizing the lost (2 Cor. 5.14-20). And Paul *trusted* the Lord to provide for his needs, guard his life, keep his commitment in tact, and hold on to him at the Day of Judgment.

Paul’s relationship with Jesus was real, constant, and vital. He prayed continuously, talked about Jesus incessantly, eagerly participated in Him in the Lord’s Supper, and even gave up his own freedom and life so that the name of Jesus might be honored and believed. *Knowing* Jesus like this – deeply, really, and continuously – gave Paul the confidence he needed to proclaim Christ to every person.

Paul *knew* Jesus – he didn’t just *believe* in Him. He believed and his belief led him to seek deeper depths of communion with the Lord Jesus Christ, and to be transformed increasingly into His image by His Spirit at work within Him (2 Cor. 3.12-18).

Paul’s witness for Jesus grew out of His relationship with Him. When our relationship with Jesus is as personal, constant, and vital as Paul’s, then we too will be more confident in our witness for the Lord.

For reflection

1. Jesus said that eternal life is to know God and Jesus Christ. How would you explain to an unsaved friend what it means to “know” God?
2. How does one come to “know” God? What is someone missing by *not* knowing the Lord?
3. Fear, obedience, love, trust: How does each of these factor into your own relationship with the Lord?

Next steps: Can you say that you “know” Jesus? What does that mean? How do you experience your relationship with Jesus? Like Paul did, gazing into the glory of God in His face? Talk with your Mission Partner about these questions.

Prayer:

2 Understand the Plight of the Lost

...remember...that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. Ephesians 2.12

Broken-hearted for the lost

I suspect that very few of us think of the Apostle Paul as the “emotional type.” He was so bold, so steeped in doctrine, so committed to the Lord’s mission. He didn’t have time to get all sentimental about people and their problems.

We would be wrong to think that way, especially where the lost were concerned. Paul ached for lost people. He wrote to the Church in Rome that he had “great sorrow and anguish” in his heart, and would be almost ready to give up his own salvation if only the Jewish people would believe (Rom. 9.1-3). We hear this passion for lost people in the way he urged the pagan King Agrippa to believe the Gospel (Acts 26.24-29).

Part of the reason Paul was so confident and consistent in his witness for Christ is that he really understood the plight of lost people, and his heart was burdened that they might be saved.

Captive to the Lie

What *is* the plight of lost people? What did Paul understand that, apparently, we do not?

First, Paul understood that lost people are living a lie and bound for eternal destruction. By refusing to acknowledge God and to embrace His salvation, lost people have become trapped in the Lie which says there is no God, or, if there is, He doesn’t matter unless you want Him to. We’re on our own down here, and each of us has to figure out what’s best for him. It’s every man for himself in a dog-eat-dog world, so keep your head down, your shoulder to the wheel, and just give it your best shot (cf. Rom. 1.18-32).

This is the way of fleeting highs but overall drudgery, disappointment, despair, defeat, and death. Paul knew this lifestyle, because he’d been there. The god of this age has blinded the minds of those who do not believe, and they’re on a downward spiral of sin and self-interest from which, short of the grace of God, there is no deliverance or escape in this life or the next.

Without hope

Further, apart from God, Paul explained, people have no hope. Oh, of course they have plans and dreams and life goals and so forth. But nothing they aspire to or achieve ever quite seems to satisfy the longing in their souls.

People are restless, anxious, and uncertain. They live in the fear of death (Heb. 2.15), and in order not to think about this too much, they fill their lives, when they’re not working, with all manner of diversions and distractions. They fear being alone or having nothing to do more than just about anything. Except death. On the surface they look happy, successful, and clever. But within, they sense their lives have no meaning, no direction, and no hope beyond a cold, dank grave at the end.

Look at the drugs and other concoctions people take to overcome their depression, get a little sleep, or hype them up above their merely mundane experience. Look at the frenzy with which they shop or play video games or swoon and rave over the latest icons of pop culture. They’re like a child in a playpen, who moves from one toy to the next, engaged for a few moments, then becoming bored. Finally, when all the toys have been tried and laid aside, all they can think to do is sit and cry for someone to come and hold them.

No true community

And they're alone, all alone. Apart from God's covenant and promise people can find relationships to be a challenge. That's because they enter their relationships following the advice of those like 70s self-help guru Robert Ringer who counseled us to "look out for number 1." Relationships that are all about me are not going to be very satisfying. We need something more, something spiritual, some reason to care for people deeply, even to the point of being willing to give our lives for them.

But this is not the way relationships work apart from God and His covenant. Where life is every man for himself, relationships are fleeting, self-interested, sensual, unstable, and ultimately unsatisfying. This explains why marriage is on the decline and why more young people prefer merely to "hook-up" rather than to settle down.

Paul knew this. He saw this in the people around him, and his heart broke for the plight of lost people. Paul got it. He understood that, for all their outward beauty, bluster, and bounty, lost people are desperately alone, afraid, and casting about for something *real and lasting*.

The Gospel is real and lasting. The Gospel overcomes the Lie, fills us with the hope of glory, and empowers us to love one another as Christ has loved us. Paul was a confident and consistent witness because, understanding the plight of lost sinners, he longed for them to come to the truth that is in Jesus.

Do we?

For reflection

1. In Romans 1.25 Paul says unbelievers have embraced the Lie. What is "the Lie" and how does it affect people who are trapped in it?
2. In Ephesians 2.12 Paul says that those who are "without God" are also "without hope." What does he mean by this? How can you see that he's right?
3. Only within the framework of God's covenant can we know the love of Christ and share it with one another. Do people who don't know the Lord long to love and be loved? How can you see this? How does the Lie affect their view of love?

Next steps: Talk with some non-believing friends or co-workers. See if you can find out what they "hope" for in life, or what their purpose is in life. Listen and pray as they share their lives with you. Does what they share make you want to share your life in Christ with them?

Prayer:

3 Know the Good News is *Good*

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

1 Corinthians 15:20-22

The Gospel is Good News

For the Apostle Paul, the revelation of Jesus Christ in the Gospel was Good News. *Really* Good News.

Paul had spent the better part of his adult life trying to gain the favor of God by his good works. He clung to his precious heritage – a “Hebrew of the Hebrews”, as he referred to himself – and he worked harder than all his peers to make sure he didn’t come up short in any way.

He looked like a real up-and-comer. But he knew himself to be a fraud, a sinner; and there was nothing he could do to rid himself of that nagging voice of conviction within him (cf. Rom. 2:14, 15; Rom. 7). He wanted to do good, but he kept doing things to gratify his own lusts and serve his own interests. This feeling of being helpless to overcome his sinful desires and propensities continued even after Paul became a believer. The difference then, however, was that in Jesus Christ He found both a righteousness that succeeded where his own best efforts had always failed, and the power to overcome his latent wickedness and to know and increase in the pleasure of the Lord.

The Gospel set Paul free from his sinful, self-serving ways because the Gospel is the power of God for salvation to all who believe (Rom. 1:16). In Jesus Christ God supplies the righteousness we lack; bears the punishment we deserve; and opens the way for us to know and serve Him, without fear of condemnation.

For Paul, this was truly Good News.

Worthy of proclaiming

So we’re not surprised when we see that, immediately after his becoming a follower of Jesus Christ, Paul set about telling everyone he could the Good News of forgiveness and life in Jesus (cf. Acts 9:20-22). Paul had experienced the forgiveness of God. He knew the indwelling power of God’s Spirit to overcome the evil in his soul with good works of grace and truth. And he knew he had been received as a child of God, Whom he lovingly and gratefully looked to as “Abba, Father.”

Is this the way we experience the Gospel? Is the Gospel such “Good News” – truly amazing news – that we just can’t wait to share it with as many people as possible, as often as we can?

I get the impression that, for some Christians, believing the Gospel is like some kind of spiritual checklist. Once we’ve prayed the “sinner’s prayer” or confessed our belief in Jesus, well, that’s it, mostly. Now it’s just a matter of staying on an even keel until the Lord returns to take us home to heaven.

The Gospel, in other words, is Good News only in that it makes it possible for us some day to be happy beyond our wildest imaginations, hopes, and dreams. We’re patient to wait for that day, trusting the Lord that He’ll keep His Word and recognize us as the guy or gal who prayed that prayer so many years ago.

But if going to heaven when we die is the only “good news” we have in the Gospel, then we don’t understand the Gospel the way Paul did. And it’s no wonder we’re not nearly as confident and consistent in proclaiming the Gospel as he was.

The Good News

So, what is the “good news” of the Gospel?

The Good News is that in Jesus Christ a new realm of life, power, righteousness, peace, and joy has broken into human experience. A *new King* is on the throne of the cosmos, a *new agenda* is unfolding as He advances His rule on earth as it is in heaven. All who enter that Kingdom know not just the forgiveness of sins, or the hope of eternal life, but real purpose in life, full and abundant joy and peace, power to *make everything new* in their souls and lives, and the virtues of faith, hope, and love to sustain and guide them. All who understand the Good News the way Paul did experience the glory of God and know His power at work within them, transforming them from glory to glory into the image of Jesus Christ. Death holds no fear for them; sin has no power over them; nothing is impossible for them; and they find they are wondrously filled with love for their neighbors and eager to show them the way into this Good News as well.

When we experience the Gospel like this, that is, when we know it, day by day, moment by moment, as the “Good News” of eternal life with God in Jesus Christ, then, like the Apostle Paul, no one will be able to shut us up. We will be eager to tell others of this glorious Kingdom, and to introduce them to the Savior Who can give them the gift of faith and transport them into His eternal realm of peace, power, and joy.

Our confidence as witnesses for Christ will grow in proportion to our experience – every day – of the Gospel as truly Good News.

For reflection

1. Why is the Kingdom of God “Good News”?
2. How does this “Good News” affect your everyday life?
3. “Our confidence as witnesses for Christ will grow in proportion to our experience – every day – of the Gospel as truly Good News.” Do you agree? Why or why not?

Next steps: How have you experienced the Gospel as Good News? Talk with some Christian friends about this question. How would you share your experience of this Good News with someone who doesn't believe?

Prayer:

4 Embrace Your Assignment

We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you. 2 Corinthians 10.13

Now what?

As we've seen, with the Apostle Paul, after he became a Christian there was never a moment when he had to ask himself, "Now what?"

He seemed to know from the very beginning that, whatever else he did, or wherever he went in life, telling other people about Jesus was going to be his primary occupation and calling. Jesus Christ had brought him the Good News of forgiveness and a life filled with righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18). How could he not tell others about such a wonderful prospect?

For Paul, the question was never "whether" to be a witness, but only, "where?" All he needed was for God to show him the area of influence He had prepared for him, and Paul would knock himself out making the Good News known there.

Areas of influence

Paul said that God had assigned to him an "area of influence." This was just what God had done with Jesus, is it not? He'd sent Jesus to an "area of influence" that stretched from Galilee in the northeast to Tyre and Sidon on the west, south to Jerusalem and across the Jordan up through Decapolis to Galilee. Jesus devoted Himself to working that area of influence by His words and deeds, so others could see that in Him the new reality and glorious Good News of the Kingdom of God had broken into time with new force and presence.

Paul's area of influence was considerably larger than Jesus', mostly because Paul had more years to work his assigned place. From Jerusalem to Asia Minor to Greece and Rome, and maybe beyond, Paul embraced his calling to bring "boasting about the Lord" Jesus into every place his feet touched the ground. Paul had no greater joy than to boast about the Lord in every place he went – talking about Jesus, living the life of Christ with others, worshiping and praising the Lord, and urging others to know Him. And when we understand and embrace our area of influence the way Paul did, we'll begin to be more confident and consistent in our witness for Christ.

Your Personal Mission Field

The Apostle Paul instructed the believers in Corinth to imitate him as he imitated Christ (1 Cor. 11.1). We can assume he intended this for us as well. Paul followed Jesus in discerning his area of influence for proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom. Each of us has been sent into the world as Jesus was sent, and as Paul went – to a particular place, time, and people, with a mission of making known the Gospel, being a witness for Jesus Christ (Jn. 20.21).

Each of us has, that is, a Personal Mission Field, unique to us, which the Lord has staked out for us in being His witnesses. Jesus said we are to "make disciples" in that Personal Mission Field, and He said we should do this "as you are going" (Matt. 28.18-20). Your Personal Mission Field is defined by the places you go, week-in and week-out. Your home, neighborhood, place of work, school, circle of friends, avocations, community – the places you go each week are the places to which the Lord is sending you as His witness, to make disciples "as you are going."

Your Personal Mission Field shouldn't be too hard to identify. Identifying your Personal Mission Field isn't the issue. Embracing it is. As Paul immediately began to seek out, discern, and work the parameters of his

area of influence, so we too should be busy discovering the places and people to whom the Lord has sent us as ambassadors of Christ and witnesses to Him.

You could easily make a list of the places you go each week, and beside each place, jot down the names of the people you encounter there. There you have it – at least, that’s a beginning. Now you need to start praying for these people, getting to know them, looking for ways to show them the love of Jesus, initiating friendly conversations, and staying alert to every opportunity to bear witness to our risen and reigning Lord (Eph. 5.15-17).

You have an area of influence – a Personal Mission Field. And the sooner you embrace that calling and begin to work your mission field like Jesus and Paul, the sooner the power of God’s Spirit will begin to grow in and flow through you, like living waters of grace, truth, and life to all the people around you (Jn. 7.37-39).

We don’t have to go to the far corners of the globe to fulfill our callings as witnesses for Christ. The world is all around us every day, and we’ve been sent to it. Embrace your Personal Mission Field the way Jesus and Paul did, and you’ll begin to a more confident and consistent witness in no time.

For reflection or discussion

1. Meditate on John 20.21. In what ways are you currently reflecting this in your life?
2. Meditate on Matthew 28.18-20. What is your responsibility toward the believers in your area of influence? How about to the lost people in your area of influence?
3. Meditate on John 7.37-39. If you were such a fountain, how would you expect this to affect your Personal Mission Field?

Next steps: Review your Personal Mission Field. Has it changed over recent weeks or months? Are you seeking to expand your Personal Mission Field? Is there someone in your PMF whom you might enlist as a Mission Partner? Talk with your current Mission Partner about these questions.

Prayer:

5 Seek the Lost

...it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ... 2 Corinthians 10.14

Take the initiative

Neither Jesus nor Paul waited to be asked when it came to reaching out to others with the Good News of the Kingdom.

Paul was extremely aggressive, everywhere he went in his Personal Mission Field. He wasn't pushy, though. We see him sitting in the synagogue, politely listening and ready to speak when asked. We observe him in the marketplaces, striking up conversations with people, asking questions, sharing his testimony, and inviting people to consider the teaching of Scripture. We even see him entertaining people in his rented home, discussing the things of Christ with great boldness and persuasive power.

He wasn't pushy, but he wasn't reticent, either.

Jesus said that He had come to seek the lost (Lk. 19.10), and Paul determined he would seek them as well. He knew that lost people are captive to the Lie and looking for happiness everywhere but in God. They're not likely to take the initiative with us in trying to find God. Paul followed the teaching of the Psalms in believing that no lost people are actually seeking the Lord (cf. Rom. 3.10, 11). We can be nice and friendly all we want, and we should be. But if we think this alone is going to provoke people to seek the Lord, we've got another thing coming. We need to seek the lost in order to proclaim the Lord to them, and when we do, we'll find more joy and power – more confidence and consistency – in being witnesses for the Lord.

Seeking the lost

So what does this involve, this seeking the lost?

Keep your Personal Mission Field in mind, first thing in the morning and throughout the day. Get in the habit of praying for the people to whom the Lord is sending you. Pray that they will be struck with the goodness and blessings of God; that the Spirit of God will strive with and woo them; that they'll come to see the emptiness of their lives and begin to desire something more. Pray for opportunities to come alongside them, and even open doors to begin a conversation about the Lord.

The more we *seek the Lord* on behalf of the lost people in our Personal Mission Fields, the more confidence we'll have in seeking them there.

Next, take the time in your Personal Mission Field to *get to know* people, and to take a real interest in them. Learn their names. See what you can find out about their families, backgrounds, interests, and the like. Offer to pray for them. Practice good listening skills and try to affirm whatever you can about their lives. People are hungry for someone to treat them like they really matter. This is what Jesus and Paul did, and it's what we should be doing as well.

Don't be reluctant to ask people questions about their spiritual lives. Do you go to church? What is your view of God? Do you think religion can make a difference in people's lives? Do you ever wonder about spiritual things, and what awaits us after we die? These are not offensive questions; in fact, you'll be surprised, as you ask them, to find that people are quite open to responding.

Be ready

Next, make sure you are ready to explain the hope that is within you (1 Pet. 3.15). If you are consistent in

reaching out to people, taking sincere interest in and praying for them, caring for, helping, and encouraging them as you can, and initiating conversations about all kinds of things, sooner or later the people in your Personal Mission Field are going to wonder why you're so different from everyone else in their lives. They might even ask, "Why do you care, when no one else seems to?"

Such a question is just a version of what Peter said we should expect as people begin to experience the hope we have in Jesus Christ. So we need to be ready. Make sure you know the Gospel and can explain it to others, and that your own experience of the Gospel is sufficiently real to talk from experience about the difference believing in Jesus Christ can make.

It can help us to be ready and confident witnesses if we will talk about the Lord with fellow Christians, sharing our experiences with Him, talking about what we're learning, and helping one another to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.

Seek out Christian friends to help strengthen you as a witness for Christ; seek the Lord on behalf of the people in your Personal Mission Field; then go confidently into your assigned area of influence to seek the lost with the Good News of Jesus and His Kingdom.

For reflection or discussion

1. Do you agree that believers should be seeking the lost in their Personal Mission Fields? Why or why not?
2. How do the examples of Jesus and Paul encourage you about this matter of seeking the lost?
3. What is your strategy for beginning to seek the lost in your Personal Mission Field? Should you have such a strategy (cf. Ps. 90.12, 16, 17)?

Next steps: Suppose someone actually asked you for a reason for the hope that is within you. What would you say? Talk with your Mission Partner about this question.

Prayer:

6 Hone Your Skills

Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you... 2 Timothy 1.6

Room to grow

We can imagine that the Apostle Paul was always trying to grow and improve in his walk with the Lord.

He said that he “pressed on” in the Lord, “ran his race” and “fought the good fight” throughout the course of his life. He urged those who worked with him to keep on improving their skills, doubtless, just as they’d seen him do (cf. Phil. 4.9; 2 Tim. 2.2).

In the life of faith there’s always room to grow. There are new things to learn, new fruit to bear, and new levels of development to bring to our skills and gifts. If we can continue to increase in the Lord we can expect that we will become more confident as His witnesses.

But what does this involve?

Personal growth

We can think of this two ways. First, we should all strive to grow spiritually, that is, to become more like Jesus Christ every day. Paul said the Christian life is a continuous struggle to lay aside our old ways of being in the world and to “put on” the Lord Jesus Christ, so that He increases in and through us (Eph. 4.17-24; 2 Cor. 3.12-18).

For example, we have the *mind* of Christ (1 Cor. 2.16). We should be concerned to improve our ability to know what Jesus knows and to think like Jesus.

We have the *heart* of God’s Spirit, renewing us from within (Ezek. 36.26, 27). He is able to do more in helping us to love the Lord and our neighbors than we’ve ever dared to ask or think (Eph. 3.20), so here’s another area where we can grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.

God has renewed our *consciences* in Jesus Christ, so that by reflecting deeply on His Law, and all His Word, we might be ready to do the good works for which He has saved us (Rom. 2.14, 15; Heb. 9.14; Eph. 2.10).

As we grow into Christ-likeness in our souls, we should expect to see more of the virtues of Christ coming to expression in our *words and deeds* (cf. Rom. 6; 1 Cor. 13). We’ll want to keep a close watch on our lives, so that we can identify areas where improvement is needed and work to take the steps that will be necessary to overcome any lingering presence of evil with the good works of Christ (Eph. 5.15-17; Rom. 12.21). The goal is that our lives should become a living sacrifice to God, holy and acceptable to Him in all our ways (Rom. 12.1, 2).

Many Christians are reluctant to bear witness to the Lord because they know their own lives don’t “measure up” and they’re afraid of being called on the carpet for their hypocrisy. Well, if we’re growing consistently and improving in the character and virtues of our Lord Jesus Christ, we won’t have to worry about that, and we’ll have more confidence in bearing witness to the Lord.

Developing your gifts

In addition to paying attention to personal growth in the Lord, we’ll also want to stir up and fan into flame whatever gifts the Lord has given us. Every believer in Jesus Christ is indwelt by the Spirit, has access to the Word of God, and possesses spiritual gifts for serving others (1 Cor. 12.7-11). The Spirit is at work within us,

making us willing and able to do what pleases God (Phil. 2.13), bringing forth fruit consistent with His holy character (Gal. 5.22, 23), and nurturing gifts to use in touching others with the grace and truth of the Lord (Rom. 12.3-8).

The writer of Hebrews tells us that we can expect to grow as we *learn and put to use* the gifts God has given us (Heb. 5.14). Here is a call for living intentionally. As we keep focused on our Personal Mission Fields, and the people to whom God has sent us, it will be clear what gifts we'll need in order to fulfill our callings. For example, we'll need the gift of giving – especially of our time and attention. Can we improve this by “practicing” self-denial and nurturing interest in others? We'll need the gift of conversation, which includes listening well, asking good questions, responding with affirmation, and so forth. We can also learn more about this, and by practicing when we're with our Christian friends, we'll be better prepared for conversations with those who do not know the Lord.

And we'll probably need to work at sharing the Gospel itself. Do we know the Gospel? Does sharing the Gospel come easily for us? Are we ready to answer the questions or respond to the objections people might pose? Here are additional areas of learning and growth where we can stir up the gifts God gives us in order to fulfill the calling He has appointed to us.

The Christian life is an adventure in continuous growth, and that for every member of the Christian family, no matter how old or young, how inexperienced or mature. We should all be pressing on in Christ to grow *in* Him and *in our callings* as His ambassadors and witnesses. The more consistent we are in seeking to grow in the Lord, the more confident and consistent we'll be as His witnesses.

For reflection

1. As you think about your Personal Mission Field, what skills will you need to begin working it more confidently and consistently?
2. Jesus and the Apostles proclaimed the Gospel of the Kingdom. As you understand it, what is the Gospel of the Kingdom?
3. Summarize your own experience of this Good News. That is, how has the Gospel affected your life? Why would it be important to be able to explain this to someone?

Next steps: Where would you like to see more growth in the Lord? Talk with a church leader about this question, and ask him or her to help you get on a more consistent path of growth – in the Lord and in your calling.

Prayer:

7 Leave the Results to God

And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, "We will hear you again on this matter." So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed... Acts 17.32-34

It's not about winning souls!

I suspect that a good many Christians are reluctant to be witnesses for Christ because they can't imagine that anyone would believe the Gospel with them. All they can envision, as they think about sharing Christ with the people around them, is folks getting upset, blowing them off, or putting them down.

If that's the case, well, we're in good company. This was the experience of Jesus and Paul. Being witnesses for Christ is not about winning souls for the Lord. Winning souls is the Lord's work, not ours (1 Cor. 3.5-9). Our job is to troll the Gospel line out, nicely baited with our lives of loving service and friendship, and to do what we can to encourage those around us to have a nibble.

When the Lord is ready to win someone for Himself, He is quite able to overcome all their opposition, anger, and meanness. Just ask Paul.

Paul was a confident witness because he understood that all he had to do was his own job. If he was faithful in bearing witness, the Lord would do whatever pleased Him with the sowing of His Word (Is. 55.10, 11). Paul was content to witness faithfully and to leave the results of his witness in the hand of the Lord.

So if we know what to expect from our witness – whatever it is the Lord might do – it can help us to be more confident and consistent in sharing our faith.

Three responses

Throughout the course of his ministry the Apostle Paul consistently encountered three responses to his preaching and evangelizing. We see them there in Athens, as Paul bore witness at the Areopagus: some mocked and scorned; some wanted to talk a bit more; and some believed. God had His way with each person, as He saw fit. Paul's job was to bear witness, and to know how to proceed with each of these responses. That's our calling as well, so let's have a look at these responses and what they indicate for us as witnesses to the Lord.

Mocking and scorn. There's no getting around it. Some folks just won't be happy to hear your witness for Christ. They might laugh at you. They might even shout or get angry, and tell you to leave them alone. They might even call you names or talk about you behind your back.

Clearly these folks don't want to hear any more about the Gospel. So, oblige them. You've made the effort and they've pushed you away. So you don't need to try again any time soon. You still need to love them and pray for them, and be "always ready" should another opportunity arise. But their blood is on their heads, so to speak; you've done what the Lord expects of you.

Talk some more. Some folks won't be ready to believe the Gospel, but they will express an openness to talking more about it at some point. At this point I wouldn't rush to make an appointment for a follow-up meeting. Just let the sown Word simmer in their souls a bit; you can pick up on it later, and here are a couple of ways to do so.

First, offer to give your friend something to read that you can discuss later. I've used C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* with good results. I also recommend you give people a copy of the Gospel of John. You can order

individual paperback copies for a good price. Ask them to read it with you and talk about it together. This could be the topic of many fruitful conversations.

Or, at some point you could just bring up the question again: “Have you thought any more about what we were discussing the other day? Would you like to get some coffee and continue our conversation?” Either of these should allow you to pick up where you left off and go forward from there.

Some will believe. For someone who expresses a desire to believe in Jesus, all you have to do is lead him in a simple prayer – phrase by phrase – in which he can tell the Lord he repents and believes in Him, and can thank Him for forgiving his sins and giving him the gift of eternal life. After this you’ll want to help your friend get started in the faith. Give him a Bible and show him how to use it. Invite him to church, then go get him and take him home with you to lunch afterwards. Offer to meet regularly for a while until your friend gets his feet firmly grounded in the Lord. Introduce him to other Christians you and he might know.

Really, these three responses, in some form or another, are about all you’ll ever hear as you carry out your calling to be a confident witness for Christ. Learn to anticipate, recognize, and respond to these, and your witness for Christ will greatly improve, and you’ll find greater joy and fulfillment in serving the Lord this way.

For reflection

1. How well prepared are you to respond to these different responses to the Gospel? Where do you need to get a little more help?
2. Have you begun working your Personal Mission Field? In what ways? Are you beginning to feel more confident in your ability to be a witness for the Lord?
3. Meditate on Ephesians 5:15-17. Discuss the implications of this passage for your witness in your Personal Mission Field.

Next steps: Enlist another Christian friend to join you in the Mission Partner program. Download the brochure summarizing the program. Share it with your friend, and challenge your friend to join you for this 6-months mission trip, right where you are!

Prayer:

The Confident Witness

Next steps

Make sure you have completed each of the *Next steps* exercises before you meet with your Mission Partner to discuss the following questions. Below, list the *Next steps* efforts and results you'd like to share with your Mission Partner:

Questions for discussion

1. What are the most important things you can do to keep working your Personal Mission Field?
2. Would you say that your confidence as a witness for the Lord has increased over the course of this Mission Partners program? Why or why not?
3. What are the greatest challenges you face in continuing to work your Personal Mission Field?
4. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study?
5. How you are working to incorporate that lesson to your walk with and work for the Lord?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.