

# A CONFIDENT WITNESS (1)



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A REVISION STUDY FROM  
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

*A Confident Witness*

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

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## Welcome to *A Confident Witness*

Jesus said, “You shall be My witnesses...” (Acts 1.8).

Are we? Do we understand what being a witness entails? How to do it? Keep it going?

Paul did. And in this two-part study we’re going to see what he, Jesus, and other apostles can teach us about being more confident and consistent in our witness for the Lord.

We hope you will benefit from this study. Please feel free to make copies of this PDF and share it with your friends. Encourage them in this journey of growing more confident in talking about our Lord.

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 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 savage the Church at its heart. And those who were his former friends sought to silence and even kill him.

Throughout the course of his ministry, he was opposed by the enemies of the Gospel, and even some who claimed to be apostles like he was (only better, of course). Everywhere Paul went he was confronted and harassed; at times he was 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 despite all this, Paul could say that he had not labored in vain; he indeed bore much fruit for the Lord, and the many saints who came to faith and the churches he founded were the result of his faithful, confident witness for Christ.

Yeah. Give us more heroes like Paul.

### *The need of the moment*

Paul was able to accomplish great things against great odds not because he was such an enthralling preacher (he was not) or had so many resources to invest in his work (he did not), but because he had such great confidence in his message and his Lord.

Because Paul *knew* the Lord, knew Him with a kind of intimacy and constancy that few believers seem to possess.

In our day the work of evangelism—bearing witness to Jesus—has all but ground 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. Do we for a moment imagine there are no more people to be saved? Or that no one is interested in what we might share? 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 are so inclined. And in order to help them be so inclined, we have “re-culturized” our churches to take away the “strangeness” of faith and create a more familiar and comfortable environment for our neighbors. In certain ways, our churches have become more a pale reflection of the pop and entertainment culture of the day than temples and dwelling places of the Lord, and the houses of prayer 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 (Matt. 28.18-20). Where are the confident and effective witnesses, like the apostle Paul, among this generation of Christians?

In this study we'll be looking to see how we can become more heroic Christians, like Paul. We're going to consider Paul and his ministry, for the most part, 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. Seldom will you hear a believer say that he “knows” Jesus in the way 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. 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). When Paul instructed us to set our minds on Jesus, where he is exalted in glory, and not on things of this worldly life (Col. 3.1-3), he did so because he understood the joy, strength, and confidence that came from doing so. Paul knew what it was to be seated with Jesus there, in heavenly places, and to look out on his life from that vantage point (Eph. 2.6).

Paul *feared* Jesus. We see that from the beginning, as the Lord confronted him on the 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 intact, and hold on to him at the Day of Judgment.

Paul’s relationship with Jesus was real, constant, spiritual and physical, 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 do these factor into your own relationship with the Lord?

*Next steps—Preparation: 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 the Lord about these questions.*

## 2 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 2.11, 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 God’s truth, 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).

The very word “lost” suggests a plight none of us wants to endure. Not knowing where we are, what’s awaiting us beyond the next turn, fearful and uncertain, whether we’re headed in the right direction, or how to get to some safer and more secure place. As we increase in knowing the Lord Jesus, we will see in His face the compassion and concern of Him Who came to seek and to save the lost (Lk. 19.10), and that will move us to share His burden.

Part of the reason Paul was so confident and consistent in his witness for Christ is that he 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? Is it really all that bad? We know that one day it will be tragic; but for now, lost people seem to be satisfied with being, well, lost. Is their plight worse than they know? What did Paul understand about the plight of the lost?

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. And if you don’t want Him to, well, that’s your choice. We’re on our own down here, and each of us must figure out what’s best for ourselves. We can’t be bound by some fixed morality; each of us must discover the truth for ourselves (cf. Rom. 1.18-32).

The more people live by this lie, the further from God and hope they spiral away. This is the way of fleeting highs but overall drudgery, disillusionment, 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*

Apart from knowing God, Paul explained, people have no hope. Oh, of course they have plans and dreams and life goals and so forth. Stuff they hope to gain, realize, or possess. But nothing they aspire to or achieve ever quite satisfies 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 more than anything being alone or having nothing to do. More than anything except

death, that is. 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 70s self-help guru Robert Ringer who counseled us to "look out for number 1." Relationships that are all about me, or me and my tribe, are not going to be very stable or satisfying. People 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, ego-boosting, and ultimately unsatisfying. This explains why marriage is on the decline and why more 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, bored, afraid, prone to ennui, 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 do you see this? How does the Lie affect their view of love?

*Next steps—Preparation: How can you see that Jesus has given you hope, fellowship, and true and abundant life? Have you thanked Him for delivering you from the plight of lost people?*

### 3 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. 7.7-12).

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 inherent wickedness and know 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 full and abundant life in 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. He experienced new power to do 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.”

Paul was so full of the newness of life Jesus had brought to Him, so resettled into the Good News of God’s love, that could not keep silent about what God had done for him.

Is this the way we experience the Gospel? Is the Gospel such “Good News”—truly amazing and transforming 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, and a *new agenda* and a *new economy* of love for God and others is unfolding, as Jesus advances His rule on earth as it is in heaven. All who enter that Kingdom know the forgiveness of sins and the hope of eternal life. But along with these, those who, like Paul, have entered the Good News of Jesus and His Kingdom discover true purpose in life, full and abundant joy and peace, power to *make everything new* in their souls and lives. And they begin cultivating and expressing 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 gives the gift of faith and transports all who believe into His eternal realm of righteousness, peace, and joy.

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

*For reflection*

1. Why is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and 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 of the Gospel as truly *Good News*.” Do you agree? Why or why not?

*Next steps – Preparation: How have you experienced the Gospel as Good News? Spend some time in prayer giving thanks and praise to the Lord for specific ways you experience the Gospel as Good News.*

## 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 abounding in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14.17, 18). How could he not tell others about such wonderful Good News?

For Paul, the question was never "whether" to be a witness, but only, "where" or perhaps more pointedly, "by what means." 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 ("sphere"). 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 in Him and hear from Him the new reality and glorious Good News that the Kingdom of God had broken into time with new force and presence.

Paul's area of influence was considerably larger than that of 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, bringing near the Kingdom, and being a witness for Jesus Christ (Jn. 20.21).

Each of us has a Personal Mission Field, unique to us, which the Lord has staked out for us and to which He sends us each day as 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."

Now let's just pause here to insist that this calling to make disciples as we are going comes to every believer in

Jesus. We can't pay someone else to do this, and we must not act as if we don't understand what this requires. Jesus is clear. Paul is clear. And the testimony of 2,000 years of Church history is clear: God has appointed all who believe in Jesus as ambassadors for His Kingdom, to show and tell Jesus and His rule to our world.

And our world begins just there, in the world which is our Personal Mission Field.

Your Personal Mission Field shouldn't be too hard to identify. *Identifying* your Personal Mission Field isn't the issue. *Embracing* it as such, 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 sends 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). All of which we'll have more to say about in subsequent installments in this series.

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 water 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 calling 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 be 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—Preparation: Have you identified your Personal Mission Field? Set aside some time to pray about this and to wait on the Lord as He clarifies for you that sphere of influence to which He daily sends you as His witness. Begin praying for those people at once.*

## 5 Think Near, Aim Small

*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.* 1 Corinthians 3.6

### *A life motto*

Do you have a life motto? The *Oxford Dictionary of English* defines a motto as “A short sentence or phrase chosen as encapsulating the beliefs or ideals of an individual, family, or institution”. Let’s note a few things about a workable motto. First, it must be brief. Just a sentence or phrase. Easily memorized or shared, and just as easily explained. That phrase must be *chosen*—embraced, owned, and put to good use.

Second, a life motto summarizes—encapsulates—one’s most cherished beliefs and ideals. Thinking of the “capsule” idea another way, a motto is a small thing that contains real potential for good, like a medicine capsule. A motto must pack all one’s most cherished beliefs and ideals into just one short phrase.

Finally, mottoes are appropriate for individuals, families, or institutions. Take the motto of The Fellowship of Ailbe: *Realizing the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God*. We’re a small band of around 40 men who are reaching into 185 countries with the Good News of the Kingdom of God. Our motto helps us keep focused, plan our work, share our vision, increase our ranks, and assess our progress. An individual’s motto can do the same.

I have a few slogans that guide my life and work, but the overarching, underpinning, and all-pervading motto is simply this: Think near, aim small. If I’m thinking near, I’ll always have an ear tuned to the Lord, because He is with me always (Ps. 119.151). And I’ll always be alert to my environment and the people in it, to serve as an ambassador of my King. And if I aim small, I can always find something at hand—a word of encouragement or appreciation, a gesture of kindness, a simple act of service or assistance—that can function as a conduit of grace into my Personal Mission Field. I don’t need big productions, weeks of planning, or bundles of cash. Just do the next small thing unto the glory of God (1 Cor. 10.31). If I’m faithful in those small things, the Lord might allow me bigger things later on.

My motto keeps me alert, ready, and active in embracing and working my Personal Mission Field. And the more I follow my motto into action, the more confident I become as a witness to Jesus in my world. I recommend you try my motto on for size: Think near, aim small.

### *Life aims*

And if all your “aims” can be grouped under just a few headings, that makes aiming easier, which, in turn, increases the likelihood and consistency of acting.

Paul indicates four primary aims that guided his work in his sphere: boasting about Jesus (2 Cor. 10.13, 15-17), edifying and being edified (v. 15), always being ready with the Gospel (v. 14; cf. 1 Pet. 3.15), and seeking to enlarge his mission field (vv. 15, 16). Let’s take a closer look.

Paul aimed always to boast about Jesus in as many ways as he could. Not about himself or his work or his knowledge, which those who boast about Jesus sometimes do—boasting about the Lord to vaunt themselves. Jesus was the object of Paul’s boasting, not himself. Pointing out His beauty in the world around, remarking His kindness as seen in a friend, sharing an insight from His Word, raising His Name as a topic of conversation, offering an impromptu prayer of thanks or praise as appropriate. No sermons or theological dispositions. No Jesus and I, me, mine. Aim small to bring Jesus and His glory to those who are near at hand.

Second, since we all have room to grow and things to learn, Paul made it his aim to learn as well as to teach. He was like Chaucer’s scholar: “And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche.” And in that order, no doubt.

### *A Confident Witness*

Taking an interest in people and things, being a good listener and an alert observer, asking meaningful questions—these can be effective means of grace as well as teaching, testifying, and sharing.

Third, Paul aimed to bring the Gospel throughout his sphere. He was not content just to mention Jesus, although he certainly did that. He knew the Gospel, ate and drank the Gospel, and longed to share all the Good News of Christ and His Kingdom to every person in his sphere.

Finally, Paul never missed an opportunity to enlarge the scope of his sphere. New places. New people. New opportunities to take Jesus and His Kingdom into the world. He pushed at the boundaries of his mission field and knocked on the doors of all kinds of people, many of whom were converted to Christ and some of whom joined Paul in his ministry.

These four aims can mark our lives and work in our own Personal Mission Field. But we'll need to embrace them and think hard each day about how to make the best use of our time for advancing our work as witnesses for Jesus.

#### *The time of your life*

The aims of our life in the life field to which Jesus sends us as His witnesses will play out in the time of our life. Every moment, every day. Paul says we should redeem our time—grab it back from being lost to frivolity, folly, and other forms of waste—and make the best use of it, like wise people, not like fools (Eph. 5.15-17).

This means being filled with the Holy Spirit in the time of our lives (Eph. 5.18-21) and yielding to His leading, teaching, convicting, and prompting at every moment. One of the slogans that guides my own life is from Psalm 90: Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom (v. 12). Every day you go out into your Personal Mission Field. Have you planned what you will do to fulfill the four mission-field aims? Are you careful, in whatever you do in your time, to do all things heartily as unto the Lord? Do you review the time of your life in prayer before you retire at the end of the day?

Planning, awareness, staying on task, improving, reviewing: These are the ways to use the time of our lives according to our life's motto and aims. And making the most of our time will help us, day by day, to become more confident witnesses for the Lord.

#### *For reflection or discussion*

1. Do you have a motto? If you were to write one, what might it be?
2. Review Paul's four aims for working his Personal Mission Field. How can you make these your aims, too?
3. How do you apply the teaching of Ephesians 5.15-21 and Psalm 90.12, 16, 17?

*Next steps—Preparation: Write your motto. Own your aims. Gladly “lerne and teche.”*

## 6 Getting in Shape

*But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*  
Ephesians 4.20-24

### *Put off, put on*

Working your Personal Mission Field requires discipline. As Rilke said in another context, “You must change your life.” But while he reached that conclusion by meditating on a statue of Apollo, we, meditating on Jesus, reach a larger and more all-transforming, albeit similar, conclusion:

You cannot be a Christian and stay the same as before.

Put off your old life, says Paul—all those sinful practices, vain pleasures, frivolous and unfruitful thoughts and ways. Be done with them. Redeem your time from all that waste!

Put on the new person that Christ in you strives to make of you, bringing true righteousness and holiness to light up every nook and cranny, place and person of your Personal Mission Field.

See Jesus seeing you as you contemplate your Personal Mission Field. You can be a confident witness for the Lord there! But to do so, you must change your life.

In particular, you must put in place and be daily exercised by four indispensable disciplines for realizing the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God in your Personal Mission Field.

### *Four disciplines*

Christians are called to “work out” (not “for”) our salvation in fear and trembling (Phil. 2.12). God has given us His Word and Spirit, and these are powerful, when properly engaged, to form us into the likeness of Jesus for the glory of God (2 Cor. 3.12-18). But we have to work at it. A changed life doesn’t just happen. And a “good enough for me” life, one that doesn’t regard change or work as part of their Christian agenda, needs to take another look at the plain teaching of Scripture (2 Cor. 13.5).

You must change your life, change in the direction of being an agent of God’s grace in your Personal Mission Field, spreading His grace around to others for praise and thanks to the Lord (2 Cor. 4.15). Taking up, or refining, four disciplines can get and keep you on task each day as a confident witness for the Lord.

First, we need good *Preparation* to work our Personal Mission Field. This entails some planning, of course, but the primary discipline by which we prepare for our daily work is prayer. We need prayer—for ourselves and those we are called to serve. Prayer to make us willing and able, by God’s Spirit, to have His pleasure as the guiding priority of our lives (Phil. 2.13). Prayer for the people we will be with each day, that God would work on their hearts to make them open to the Gospel. Prayer for boldness, compassion, alertness, and readiness to speak or serve. Prayer every day and throughout the day. Prayer for confidence in being and bearing witness to Jesus.

The second discipline interfaces with preparation because, since we intend a *Demonstration* of Christlikeness to others, we shall have to pray and prepare diligently for it. We want to show Jesus to the people around us—His character, gracious words, intentional manner of life, concern for the needs of others, readiness to teach (cf. Heb. 5.12). We need to demonstrate confidence in Scripture, that we believe the Bible and are not afraid to live according to its teaching. And we must prepare to demonstrate God’s love to people in all the myriad

small ways that can communicate the hope we have in the Lord (1 Pet. 3.15).

Our witness for Christ begins in what we *are*—“you shall *be* My witnesses”—before it flows forth in what we *say*.

The third discipline is that of *Conversation*. To do the work God intends, the Gospel must be heard. To be heard willingly and well, the Gospel must come in words fitly chosen. And those words will come as part of a conversation—or as the culmination of many conversations—with the people to whom God sends us. The best way to learn how to have a conversation with those who do not know the Lord is to have frequent conversations with the Lord as well as with those who know Him. Good conversationalists, James suggests, do more listening than speaking (Jms. 1.19) and who have tamed their tongues from old ways so that they can speak in new ways as the image-bearers of Christ (Jms. 1.21, 2.12, 3.1-12).

Finally, a discipline of *Transformation* should inform and improve each of these other disciplines and more. We want to be better at preparing and prayer, at being and conversing, and in doing everything we do to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10.31). We can be transformed if we set our sights on specific goals and if we keep in step with the Spirit as He is at work within us. Having a soul friend to encourage and help us in specific ways of growth can also make transformation a reality in every facet of our lives.

*Energy applied to ends*

Work can be defined as energy applied to ends: the energy of combustion to get us to work; the energy of electricity to help us see or communicate; the energy locked up in food to keep us going; and so forth. Spiritual work—like the work we do as confident witnesses in our Personal Mission Field—requires spiritual energy, and spiritual energy emerges from a simple formula:

Word of God + Daily Attention and Prayer

The Holy Spirit of God = Spiritual Energy

Prayerful reading, studying, and meditating on God’s Word every day, in the power and according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, leads to the spiritual energy—desire, understanding, and conviction—for doing God’s work.

This is the only way to do the work God has called us to in our Personal Mission Field. And the good news is that it works to change our lives so that we might be confident witnesses unto the Lord.

*For reflection or discussion*

1. How do you react to the idea that you must change your life?
2. In which of the four disciplines we discussed do you need to improve?
3. How does being transformed into the likeness of Jesus help us in working our Personal Mission Field?

*Next steps—Transformation: Write a list of things to do to improve in changing your life.*

## 7 Paul's Rule of Life

*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*

### *A simple rule*

As with all sports, and much of life in general, there is an art to football. We can learn from going a little deeper into the game than we typically do.

I'm not here to argue the virtues of football. Someone more eloquent than I will have to undertake that challenge. I would merely like to point out that football players possess a kind of intelligence that some of us may never have considered. An intelligence that allows them to understand the strategy and tactics for each down, discern the obstacles and opportunities before them, calculate their best next step, summon the appropriate skills, and bend the energy of every member of their body to achieve their goal. And all this in just a few seconds before the ball is snapped.

Football players operate on rules. For every play a rule is designed that tells them where the play is going, whom to block, and when to act. Players are successful who master the rules and execute their part in each play with excellence and consistency. For example: Let's say you're the center, the guy who hikes the ball. Just watching, you might think that to hike the ball and run into somebody is about all he has to do. But as a center comes out of the huddle to the ball, he surveys the situation on the other side. Then he tells everybody else what they're up against, and all the other players on the line click through the rule that governs this play in this situation. That rule may be as simple as "On, Backside, Linebacker, Downfield." That is, when the ball snaps, if there is someone directly in front of me—"On"—I block him, preferably, in a direction away from where the play is going. If there's no one "On" me, I block the guy away from the direction of the play—"Backside." No one there either? Go for the "Linebacker"—the defender standing behind his own defensive line. And if there's no Linebacker, then head "Downfield" and block anyone you encounter down there.

Rules. Priorities of action. All players have them for every play and every situation. Successful plays happen when everybody executes their rule. And what's true of football is true of life as well. When believers execute their rule faithfully, consistently, and with excellence, grace spreads to more and more people and the Kingdom of God moves forward.

### *One rule for all*

Working and bearing fruit in your Personal Mission Field with the disciplines of preparation, demonstration, conversation, and transformation reduces to a single set of rules: Boast, Edify, Evangelize, Expand. In every situation, no matter what you're doing or whom you're with, when you are doing the work of a confident witness, these are the priorities of your Rule for Life. Let's take a closer look at how Paul described these.

First, boasting about Jesus. Boasting about Jesus is always appropriate (2 Cor. 10.13, 15-17). Boasting about Jesus doesn't mean being obnoxious about Him. It's more a matter of recognizing and acknowledging His Presence and work at any moment. Hopkins once wrote, "...for Christ plays in 10,000 places, /Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his..." Jesus is always about the business of making Himself known. We meet Him each morning in His Word. Can we boast about Him to one another, rejoicing in how He has spoken to us? Do we see and hear Him in creation? Acknowledge Him and point out His glory there? We may even see Him in someone's act of kindness or thoughtfulness. Why not thank them for being Jesus to you?

There are as many ways to boast about Jesus as there are situations in a day. But unless we practice—beginning in prayer and working out into our lives (Ps. 90.12, 16, 17)—we'll miss the opportunities God brings to us for boasting in the Lord.



Next, edify. Make it your business to build others up and to allow them to edify you (v. 15). Think near and aim small as you affirm, appreciate, and encourage the people to whom the Lord sends you. Let your words be always gracious and edifying (Col. 4.6; Eph. 4.29), and let them convey the joy and the hope you have in the Lord.

Then, evangelize (v. 14). There is always something we can do to sow Kingdom seed into the lives of those to whom the Lord sends us. Maybe not the whole Gospel every time, but at some point, yes, a loving and thorough conversation designed to *re*-evangelize those who already know the Lord and, at other times, to share the Good News of Jesus and His Kingdom with those who are still trapped in some form of wrong belief. Make sure you know the Gospel and that you can, like Paul, explain concisely how you came to know Jesus and what He has done in your life.

Finally, expand (v. 16). Look for ways to enlarge your Personal Mission Field. New people. Different situations. Unexpected open doors of opportunity. Like Paul, we need to stretch out the horizons of our Personal Mission Field, trusting the Lord to allow us to venture into new territory as agents of grace and ambassadors of His Kingdom.

*It's just that simple*

Boast, Edify, Evangelize, Expand. That simple rule of life as a witness for the Lord can help you make the most of every opportunity to glorify God and show Jesus to your world (Eph. 5.15-17). As you read the Word each day, let it inform and embellish each facet of your rule. Pray that God will guide you in specific ways to live out your rule each day. Talk with other believers and encourage one another in living according to this simple rule. And rejoice at each successful “play” as the Lord “moves the ball” of His Kingdom a little bit further down the road of your journey.

You will live by some rule of life, some raft of repetitive disciplines and practices that will shape what you do each moment and thus what your life will contribute to the world. Remember that you are called to the Kingdom and glory of God (1 Thess. 2.12), that Jesus has appointed you to be His witness and has supplied you with the power to succeed in this (Acts 1.8), and that every moment of time and every situation in life are to be used for the glory of God (Eph. 5.15-17; 1 Cor. 10.31). Then, whatever you're doing, think near and aim small to boast in Jesus, encourage and edify those around you, share something about the Good News of Christ, and reach out in new ways to enlarge your Personal Mission Field.

This is what Paul did, and Paul instructed us to imitate him as he imitated Jesus (1 Cor. 11.1).

*For reflection of discussion*

1. If you don't accept the rule of life outlined here, what rule will you live by instead?
2. Do you have a prayer partner or a soul friend? How might having one of these help you in living according to Paul's rule of life?
3. What can you do to begin improving your rule of life?

*Next steps—Transformation: Write out your rule of life so that you could share it with someone over a cup of coffee.*

*A Confident Witness*

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. How can you see that Paul was a confident witness for Jesus Christ?
2. Why do you think Christians today have lost confidence in their ability to bear witness to the Lord?
3. What does Paul mean by a “sphere”—a Personal Mission Field? Have you mapped yours? Are you starting to work it?
4. What should be your goals for working your Personal Mission Field? What disciplines will you need to master?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study? How are you incorporating that lesson into your daily walk with and work for the Lord?

*For 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](http://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 contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, P. O. Box 8213, Essex, VT 05451.

Thank you.