

## YOU ARE AN EXPERT WITNESS!

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In Luke 24, Jesus has been resurrected and says to his disciples, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you – that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning with Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”

Evangelism ... some folks would just rather not! Yet Jesus makes it clear that sharing his love and truth are the basis of our calling as Christians. Where do we begin? Well, we begin “in Jerusalem”. And of course, Jerusalem is our family, our friends, our co-workers, the people we meet every day in our world. And our instructions are to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins.

Right away, it feels overwhelming. We picture ourselves with a sandwich board, standing near Wal-Mart, annoying passersby ... we see ourselves going door to door, handing out tracts and having doors slammed in our faces ... we imagine ourselves, friendless, having scared off everyone we know with our relentless preaching.

Relax. That’s not necessarily the idea! The truth is, evangelism is something we do every day of our lives, usually when we’re not even aware of it. We don’t have to be obnoxious and it won’t leave us friendless; in fact, the result will be more likely the opposite.

So how does this happen – this proclamation of repentance and forgiveness of sins? Go back to the passage for a moment: “Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures ... and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day ...’”

Basic to our understanding of evangelism is ... BELIEVING THIS. It’s all true. Do you really believe it in your heart? Because if you do, it’s almost impossible for you NOT to evangelize.

You don’t have to be a scripture expert. I hear often that folks are hesitant to evangelize because they don’t know the Bible the way they feel they should. You have to know the Bible well enough to BELIEVE it ... you have to know it well enough to let its truth change you and, over time, help you grow into a mature Christian. The truth is, if you open your heart and mind to receive God’s truth, you will be changed.

If you’re out of the habit of reading scripture, start with the first couple chapters of Luke – the Christmas story. It’s familiar and inspiring. Finish Luke, and read the epistles – always full of good, practical stuff – and read the book of Judges just for fun. The important thing is that you read something. Will you absolutely understand it all? Probably not! But you don’t have to – the passage says Jesus will open your minds to understand the scriptures. Be patient with yourself, and READ.

Want an even deeper experience with scripture? Study it with others. There’s nothing better than talking about the scripture, exchanging ideas and experiences; this really helps make scripture real and relevant to you.

Scripture is powerful. You don't have to be able to quote long passages, and it should never be used as a weapon against others to create guilt or condemnation. Scripture at this point is for you – to help let the Spirit in, and change you into the person God wants you to be.

And what kind of person is that? An evangelist! We're not called to judge others; we're called to love them. We're not called to try and change others; we're called to accept and love them just as they are. If there's changing to be done, God will take care of it. We're called to offer others the same forgiveness we receive from God – which means, of course, that we first must accept God's grace and forgiveness and, over time, learn to forgive ourselves. We're called to listen to others, sometimes at length, learn their stories, pray for them as, more and more, we come to see how much they need God ... just as much as we need God. We've got to build relationships with the people in our world, learn to know and love them, just as they are. And that takes time.

When the moment comes (and it will) in a relationship, to speak about the Lord, the Holy Spirit will open the door for that to happen. And when he does, all you have to do is tell the truth. It's like on TV, when they call an "expert witness" to the stand. You're the expert witness in your own life. You know what you believe, and you know the difference God's made in you, and the ways God has helped you. It's very likely that your testimony won't come as a surprise to whoever you're talking to. If they know you at all, they already know you go to church ... and they've already seen evidence of God's love and grace in the way you treat them, and other people, too.

They've probably been worried that they have to be perfect before they can come to God. But if you've been honest with them, you're helping to reassure them that, clearly, they DON'T! You're as far from perfect as they are, and look ... Jesus loves you just fine.

Read scripture. Jesus will open your mind to understand it. Live what you believe: as one who's received grace and love from the Lord, offer it to others. Evangelism isn't a scary, burdensome thing – it's YOU, an expert witness, being exactly who you are, and loving others as you've been loved.