

Women & More

Out of Our Comfort Zone

Lesson 9: **October 29, 2015**—*influence*

To be a witness in God's economy—is it not that **we are already being witnessed by a great host**? People are hearing our words and watching our actions whether we acknowledge it or not—and some of those are leaning over heaven's balconies. Hebrews 12:1-2 *“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ²Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

This verse says that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses—watching us! So before our words and actions are witnessed by those on this earth, they are witnessed by God, and this great cloud of witnesses. Who are they? The Barker-Kohlenberger *Expositor's Bible Commentary* explains it this way: “Perhaps we should think of something like a relay race where **those who have finished their course and handed in their baton are watching and encouraging their successors.**” The thought is clearly that a vast host of witnesses have passed before us and are now witnessing our progress in living out the Christian faith.

In verse two, we are to throw off two things: **(1) everything that hinders**—not necessarily bad things, but certainly the unnecessary. Rick Warren explains: “It is impossible to do everything people want you to do. You have just enough time to do God's will. If you can't get it all done, it means you're trying to do more than God intended for you to do. If you want your life to have impact, focus it! Stop trying to do it all. Do less. Prune away even good activities and do only that which matters most.”

And then, still in verse two, we are also to throw off **(2) the sin that so easily entangles**. Charles Spurgeon: “The believer is a new creature, he (she) belongs to a holy generation and a peculiar people—the Spirit of God is in him (her), and in all respects he (she) is far removed from the natural man (woman); but **for all that, the Christian is a sinner still.**”

When do we leave our comfort zone? Look at the four animals in our key verse: sheep, wolves, snakes and doves. We are sent out **like sheep, among wolves!** O my, this does not sound good, we say—we'd better have plenty of wolf-repellent with us. And we do, because we can be absolutely sure that God will not ask us to go anywhere that he does not intend to go before us and with us. It may be across the room, across the street, or across the world—maybe China!

The second part of that passage in Matthew 10:16, after “*I am sending you out like sheep, among wolves...*” says: “*Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.*” Because of the wolves, and us being the sheep—with the wolf-Repellent going with us—we’re to be as shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves.

Let’s dissect those meanings using some scholarly commentary, because the idea of being sheep among wolves, of being shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves sets a holy fear in us. Our worst scenario comes to mind. But Matthew Henry quiets our fears with these words: “**Their fear set them a praying**, and that was a good effect of it. God brings us into straits that He may bring us to our knees.”

Through prayer and faith in the power of the *One* we pray to, we can go to that fearful place—out of our comfort zone. When did God leave His comfort zone?

God in a womb—growing
 God in a manger, and stranger,
 God in a sickroom—touching
 In a fishing boat—catching
 God in a tax collector’s home—eating.

God on a mountainside—praying
 God on a shore frying fish; and sharing
 God on rough seas—calming
 In a crowd teaching and feeding
 God in a garden—sweating.

God waking disciples—pleading
 God enduring torturing and mocking
 God forgiving yelling—spitting
 On a cross—sacrificially dying
 God in a tomb...and then rising!

—R.Jeanene Moore

Someone has said: “There is but a step from rapturous worship to the glowing missionary spirit, which is a sure outgrowth of filial love and reverent adoration—*‘Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.’*”

The **Teacher** is Jesus, the Word
 We sit and we hear Him...
 And as we trust what we hear
 And believe in our hearts
 We see very God come to life in us.



We know the *Truth* through the Word
 And as we're called to account,
 To give an answer for the hope that fills us
 The answer is ready...
 Our shoes are shod with the Gospel of peace
 And it flows out on the Spirit's breath!

—R. Jeanene Moore

In Defense of the Gospel

Prosecutor: “Your Honor, I call Jeanene Moore to the stand.”

“Mrs. Moore, tell the jury what you know about this so-called *Gospel*.”

Jeanene: “*I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.*”

P: “And pray tell, Mrs. Moore, how is it that you have come to know this?”

J: “I’ve read it in the Words of my *Faithful Covenant God*, in Job 19:25, and I have personally come to know the Redeemer, Jesus Christ.”

P: “Are you saying Mrs. Moore that you have personally met this redeemer person? What possible proof do you have of that?”

J: “Yes, I have called on Him in believing faith, and the proof is in 1 John 2:3—
“We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands.””

P: “Your Honor, I would like the court to note that this is a hostile witness. Since when has this court accepted the Word of God, or should I say the Bible—mere man’s words with errors—as proof of any testimony?”
 (Ref: 1 Thessalonians 2:13.)

His Honor: “Mrs. Moore, what have you to say to this charge?”

J: “For more than a period of 1,600 years, 40 different authors wrote the 66 books of the Bible. Four hundred years of silence fell between the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 of the New, and yet Genesis to Revelation tell one unified story. Who could have done that but God?”

HH: “You do have a point; that definitely appears to be a ‘God Thing’!
 Whether I believe the Bible or not, I do believe in a God.”

P: “O Your Honor, the witness has gone clear off of the subject! Perhaps the witness has forgotten that my original request was for her to *‘tell the jury what she knows’*.”

HH: “I believe she just did that! Case is dismissed—court is adjourned.”

The Word of God that we have readied ourselves with—the study of God’s amazing book—will witness **for us**: Isaiah 30:20-21 “*Although the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, your teachers will be hidden no more; with your own eyes you will see them. 21Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it.’*”

◆Satan feeds us with the idea that our testimony has to be believed for it to be a valid witness. If the witness of Jesus Christ, more often than not, was unbelieved by those he witnessed to on this earth, then who do we think we are—more believable than Jesus? We know what God teaches us in his word, about his Word. And what we know of His Word, that is what we are to share!

There is an interesting passage in Ezekiel 2, where he has been called to prophesy warning to rebellious Israel and three times Scripture says: “*whether they listen or fail to listen*” in verses 4, 7 and 11. Then there is the account of the Prophet Jonah sent to warn the inhabitants of that great Assyrian city, Nineveh, of the destruction their city was facing at the hand of God if they did not repent of their wickedness—self-confident pride and extreme cruelty.

Remember Jonah did not want to go, and for a very good reason—in his estimation? Assyria had been a constant and particularly cruel enemy to Israel. We know Jonah ran the other way, rather than go to Nineveh, but we also know that we cannot run from God. Interestingly, when Jonah was thrown into the sea by the Phoenician sailors, and God commanded a fish to swallow him, the fish obeyed promptly when he received the call. God has a way of changing our minds—some life-threatening drama, sea-sickness, stomach juices—and Jonah preached to the Ninevites: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed!”

We could call Jonah the “reluctant” witness, and we know from what he said after Nineveh repented, that that was exactly what he had feared. They heard the message, believed the warning, and repented. The miracle is that they paid attention to Jonah’s message, but we can be sure that the Lord worked the miracle in Nineveh, and not Jonah or his commentary! God had gone before Jonah and prepared the Ninevites. *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* suggests that with the mountain tribes advancing from the North, they had an awakened consciousness of their weakness and possible defeat by these enemies, which might have gone a long way in explaining their readiness to hear the Prophet.

Scripture exhorts us to be ready to give an answer. And the following Scripture passage touches on several of the lessons we’ve had so far this fall. 1 Peter 3:13-17 “**Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? 14But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. ‘Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.’ 15But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect 16keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. 17It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.**” Notice, again, that there will be those who speak maliciously!

If we spend great time in God's Word preparing ourselves to be ready, then when the time comes to "give an answer" it will be imbedded in our hearts, on the edge of our minds, and on the tip of our tongue. Hudson Taylor, famed missionary to China, speaking about being a witness: "I am waiting on Thee, Lord, to open the way."

This is where we want to camp: **Readying ourselves to give an answer**, but leaving the moment for the answer up to our omnipotent—accent on the **Potent**—God! We don't just live our lives nonchalantly, not necessarily being a witness for Christ, and then pull out the witness when we think the time is right. This is too big for us—the **knowing when the time is right is for God to know**, and us to 'go' at his command! But being ready, now that is something we can sink our teeth into if we're really serious about being used of God.

There is a fair amount of going involved in following Christ! As His disciples, we may be placed squarely out of our element—*comfort zone*. But the Comforter will remain faithful! Chuck Colson, of Prison Fellowship International said: "What he has chosen for my most significant witness was not my triumphs or victories, but my defeat!" Mark 1:17-18 "***Come, follow me,*** *Jesus said,* ***'and I will make you fishers of men.'*** ¹⁸*At once they left their nets and followed him.*" Jesus calls us not only to "come" to Him, but to "go" for Him. We are to work with God to represent Christ to a lost and dying world!

After we have come to Him in believing faith, then we must be about preparing to go for him and share what's happened to us, and what we've learned in the journey. *Women & More* is so much about identifying God's "call" as women of faith, wives, mothers, and grandmothers, homemakers, in our neighborhoods and in our world; and becoming equipped to "walk" every call.

Paul to the Thessalonian Church in 1 Thessalonians 2:11-13 "*For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children,* ¹²*encouraging, comforting and urging you to **live lives worthy of God,** who calls you into his kingdom and glory.* ¹³*And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it **not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.***"

And in 1 Thessalonians 3:10-11: "*Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.* ¹¹*Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you.*"

Charles Spurgeon "We can do nothing of ourselves, but we can do everything by the help of our God; let us, therefore, in His name determine to go out personally and serve with our flaming torch of holy example; and with our trumpet tones of earnest declaration and testimony."