



GOD'S WITNESSES Heroes of Faith: Paul

September 9, 2023

1 PREPARING

A. THE SOURCE

Matthew 5:3-12 (NIV) • “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peace-makers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Galatians 2:20 (NLT) • “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Ephesians 2:10 (NLT) • “For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”

Luke 7:33-35 (NIV) • “For John the Baptist

came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved right by all her children.”

1 Thessalonians 4:1-3 (The Message) • “One final word, friends. We ask you—*urge* is more like it—that you keep on doing what we told you to do to please God, not in a dogged religious plod, but in a living, spirited dance. You know the guidelines we laid out for you from the Master Jesus. God wants you to live a pure life.”

(See additional passages in student material.)

Conflict and Courage, p. 92 • “The great lesson here taught is for all time. Often the Christian life is beset by dangers, and duty seems hard to perform. The imagination pictures impending ruin before and bondage or death behind. Yet the voice of God speaks clearly, ‘Go forward.’ We should obey this command, even though our eyes cannot penetrate the darkness, and we feel the cold waves about our feet. The obstacles that hinder our progress will never disappear before a halting, doubting spirit. Those who defer obedience till every shadow of uncertainty disappears and there remains no risk of failure or defeat, will never obey at all. Unbelief whispers, ‘Let us wait till the obstructions are removed, and we can see our way clearly.’ but faith courageously urges an advance, hoping all things, believing all things.”—Ellen G. White,

Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estates, 2010.

In Heavenly Places, p. 168 • “A Christian, as described by the Scriptures, is a person who is separated from the world in his aims and practices and is united with Christ—a possessor of the peace which Christ alone can bestow, finding that the joy of the Lord is his strength and that his joy is full. Christians will not leave the world to perish unwarned, and make no effort for the reclaiming of the lost. . . . Those who truly love Christ . . . watch for every opportunity to employ the means at their command in doing good and in patterning after the works of Christ. They will not yield to temptations to make alliances with the world. They will not unite with secret orders and bind themselves by intimacies with unbelievers. But those who are not wholly on the side of Christ are to a large degree controlled by the maxims and customs of the world.”—Ellen G. White, Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estates, 2010.

B. WHAT'S TO BE SAID ABOUT “GOD'S WITNESSES”

Witnessing is simply sharing our faith with others. It is a personal activity. As such it means many things to many people. A witnessing activity that is easy for one person will be difficult for another. We all need to step out of our comfort zones now and then to grow, but teens particularly need to be supported and encouraged so that their witnessing risks are stepping-stones and not deterrents.

Stepping out and being a witness for God can be overwhelming, but also awesome! Teens need to know that youth leaders are standing with them in their witnessing activities. They need to be in an environment that supports risk-taking in terms of witnessing. Their ideas should be taken seriously and, wherever possible, implemented. They are the future leadership of the church, and should be allowed leadership in witnessing opportunities to gain experience.

The mere act of following Christ in today's society can make teens appear to be out of the

mainstream, even if they aren't participating in radical witnessing. They need to know that they are part of a larger picture, one that is not in sync with the world, but exists to lead the world to Christ. They are partners with God in winning souls for heaven!

C. WHERE WE'RE GOING WITH “GOD'S WITNESSES”

As a result of this lesson we would like the students to be able to:

1. Determine their particular witnessing style.
2. Plan ways to reach out of their comfort zone and try new things.
3. Be prepared for criticism regarding their life for Christ and learn how to respond.

D. MATERIALS NEEDED

Beginning • (Activity A) dice, list of silly activities (sing a song, perform a somersault, do jumping jacks, recite a text or poem, etc.; you need a total of 12 activities).

Connecting • Bibles, student lessons.

Applying • White/chalkboard, markers/chalk.

2 BRIDGING

A. THE WEEK IN REVIEW

Allow 10 minutes at the beginning of class for students to:

1. Share anything that was meaningful to them in this lesson.
2. Engage in a discussion about the topic of the lesson in connection to the belief highlighted this week.
3. Say the Bible memory text either individually or in a group.

B. OTHER SABBATH SCHOOL COMPONENTS

>> Song service

- >> Mission emphasis (find a link for Adventist *Mission* for youth and adults at www.realtimefaith.net)
- >> Service projects reports

3 BEGINNING

NOTE TO TEACHER: Put together your own program with options from the categories below—Beginning, Connecting, Applying, and Closing. Please keep in mind, however, that the students need to have an opportunity to be interactive (participate actively *and* with one another) and to study from the Word.

A. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • Say: You never know when you'll be asked to stretch a little out of your comfort zone. By practicing in a safe setting you will be more relaxed meeting new challenges.

Get set • Let the students know that everyone gets a chance to roll the dice. They then have to perform whatever activity is on the list that corresponds to the number they rolled. If they cannot perform a particular activity (example: a girl in a dress can't somersault), they can roll again.

Go • Ask: Have you ever wondered what it would be like to have the chance to witness in some way on the spur of the moment? Ever wonder if you could go through with it? Stretching the limits of our comfort zone isn't always comfortable, but it's a great way to grow. We're going to do a little stretching. When you roll the dice, you must perform whatever activity goes with the number you rolled. Ready, set, stretch!

Debriefing • Ask: How did you feel doing something that felt silly in front of your friends? Which was worse, imagining how it would be or actually doing it? If you did it again, do you think it would be easier? In what ways does stretching help you to

grow? How can we apply this exercise to our spiritual lives?

B. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • Say: Witnessing is sharing your faith with someone. Even simpler, it's talking to someone and trying to help them by telling them how Jesus helps you.

Get set • Pair students and give each pair the opportunity to share something (witness) with the other person (see below).

Go • Say: The simple definition of witnessing is telling someone about Jesus. It doesn't have to be scary or high-pressure. It's like telling someone about one of your friends. But, in this case, what you say can save someone's life, their eternal life. You can be a heavenly lifesaver just by introducing someone to Jesus. We all have a story about how Jesus helped us through something. Take turns telling each other something that Jesus has done for you.

Debriefing • Ask: What did you think about the things your partner told you? Did you find them interesting? Did you want to know more? What kinds of statements were the most interesting? What did you learn about what to say and not to say?

Ask: If you had only one opportunity to tell someone about Jesus, what would you say? What makes your story important to others?

C. BEGINNING ILLUSTRATION

In your own words, tell the following story:

Joley carries her Bible to school. Sometimes she reads it during study hall. When she has a chance, she talks to her unbelieving friends about Jesus. She gets picked on a lot, but she doesn't seem to care. She never retaliates, just smiles and goes her own way. Her Christian friends think she should keep a lower profile, not stick out so much; her behavior embarrasses them. They're also worried that she'll

never get to be popular, that everyone will think she's a big joke.

Debriefing • Ask: What would you tell Joley? How would you feel if she was your friend? Is Joley doing anything outrageous? Why do you think she gets picked on? How should Joley react to other people's opinion of what she does? As Christians, what should we think of the opinions of others? How should we react when we are considered radical or a big joke?

4 CONNECTING

A. CONNECTING TO THE KINGDOM

Present the following ideas in your own words:

You can be sure that the special citizens in God's kingdom aren't couch potatoes. They're the ones out there doing the—yes, sometimes impossible—things God asks them to do to spread the Word. They're the ones who are willing to do whatever it takes to save souls. That's what makes them "God's witnesses."

Paul tells us in Galatians 2:20, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (NLT). We're not living for ourselves down here on this slowly spinning rock. We're living for the God who put us here and will someday soon come to take us home, where we belong. Earth is like a ship. We hit an iceberg (Satan), and we're sinking. But there are plenty of lifeboats. On this ship many people lose their lives, not because there *aren't* lifeboats, but because they don't *get in* the lifeboats. Our job, our special mission, is to help people get in the lifeboats. How far would you go to make that happen?

Say: In 1912, the Titanic hit an iceberg and sank in the North Atlantic Ocean. Over 1,500 people died because there were not enough lifeboats and those in lifeboats did

not try to help those in the water. **Ask:** How do you think those in lifeboats felt as they watched their fellow passengers, many of them husbands and sons, drown? (Regretted they didn't help more of them get on the boats; were sad they didn't get on the boats.) **How do you think we'll feel if people we know and love are lost because we didn't tell them about Jesus?** (We'll wish we'd said something when we had the chance. We'll think that being embarrassed for a few minutes is nothing compared to being lost for eternity.) **What do you think the drowning people would have said to those who were on the boats?** (Why didn't you help me? Didn't you really care for me?)

B. CONNECTING TO THE LESSON ILLUSTRATION

Ask someone beforehand to read or tell the story from Sabbath's section of the lesson.

Share the following thoughts in your own words:

There are people who will shake their heads at us when we stand up for what we believe in and follow our consciences. Kids at school might think you're weird or nuts. They might make fun of you, the way they made fun of Noah. Just like Paul, Noah made a difference and the human race was saved. We can all trace our ancestors back to that one brave man who was willing to be the laughingstock and have everyone think he was crazy—talking about a flood (it had never rained before) and building a boat on land (it couldn't float). But Noah had heard God and was following what he had been told. Sadly, the people wouldn't listen.

Ask: What compelled Paul to go on his missionary journeys? He was often treated badly but witnessing for God was his priority. Why do you think Noah was willing to endure laughter and scorn to follow God's direction in building the ark? (He believed God. He trusted what God said.) **When we're facing a potentially embarrassing moment,**

when our choosing to follow Christ in a given situation will itself be a witness, what should we believe in and care about? (God. Ourselves. We should care about only the eternal results, not what people think about us here and now.)

C. CONNECTING TO LIFE

Pose the following scenario:

Your youth group has decided to do some outreach at the mall in your town. They are going to hand out tracts to people, and everyone who feels comfortable is invited to go up to a microphone and share their testimony. The thing is that you know a lot of your non-Christian friends hang out at the mall and they'll see you. That should be a good thing, right? But you're embarrassed just thinking about it. What will you do?

Give each student one of the four verses below. Ask them to get into groups according to the verse you gave them, like verses together. Ask each group to discuss briefly what their verse says in relation to being God's witnesses. Then have each group share. Comments beside each verse below will help you guide the sharing.

Hebrews 11:7. During this group's sharing, **say: When God asked Noah to build a boat in the middle of a field, people thought he was nuts. Noah couldn't even console himself with the thought that his humiliation had resulted in the salvation of a single soul outside his own family. No one else got in the boat. What does this tell us about witnessing?** (We are responsible only for witnessing; it is God who is responsible for saving. We shouldn't let embarrassment stop us.)

Mark 16:15. During this group's sharing, **say: The disciples certainly encountered many people who laughed at them and some who even wanted to kill them. But they didn't let that stop them. How should we react?** (It doesn't matter what people think or how they react to us. We just have to be open to what God calls us to do.)

Matthew 13:53-58. During this group's shar-

ing, **say: People who knew Jesus were more likely to laugh at Him and not take Him seriously. Why do you think that is?** (They didn't want to believe that someone they'd grown up with knew more than they did.) **How do you think we should treat people we know who don't take us seriously or even ridicule our witnessing attempts?** (We should treat them with kindness and respect. We should try not to look down on them because we feel we "know more than they do." We should take an honest interest in them so we can see best how to meet their needs. And we should be patient with them.)

1 Kings 17:1. During this group's sharing, **say: Elijah took a great risk telling King Ahab that there would be no rain or dew until he said the word. If dew or rain had fallen, he'd look foolish. How important is it for us to be sure it's God we're following?** (It's the most important thing.) **If God asks us to take a risk, as He did Elijah, how should we react?** (If we're sure God is asking us to take a risk, He will also give us the strength and courage to take it.)

5 APPLYING

A. APPLICATION ACTIVITY

Ask students to brainstorm a list of potential witnessing opportunities. Remember that this is not just things like passing out printed material, etc. Witnessing opportunities are also anytime we choose to do what God asks us to, even when we will be going against the flow of what everyone around us is doing. For example, going to sit with a lonely student in the lunchroom instead of with your usual group.

On a white/chalkboard, write what the students come up with. Encourage them to think outside of their comfort zone, and outside what they usually think of as witnessing activities. When you have a good list, vote on the activities listed to find out which is the one most students would participate in. If possible, make plans to participate in this activity as a group.

Encourage those students who worked on this activity for Friday's lesson to share what they wrote.

Debriefing • Ask: Which of these activities interested you the most? (Answers will vary.) Which interested you the least? (Answers will vary.) Think about the ones that interested you the least. How might you try to get involved? (Might participate behind the scenes at first, could help with the planning and a hands-off position.) How will you be able to tell if the activities you are involved in are just not right for you? (God will tell me when I'm praying; I will always feel uncomfortable with it, and that will help me know it's not right for me.)

B. APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. How do the types of activities you enjoy give you clues about the kind of witnessing you may be most interested in?
2. How can you tell if you're stepping out of your comfort zone or forcing yourself to do something that just makes you uncomfortable? Where do you draw the line?
3. In what ways can you stretch the limits of your comfort zone gently?
4. Discuss several ways of handling people who are critical of your witnessing style and think you are radical or overzealous when it comes to sharing your faith.
5. If you could do one wild and crazy thing to share your faith, what would it be?
6. Make up some possible responses to friends who think you're "out there" when

it comes to witnessing.

7. In what ways can Jesus advise you when you're unsure of how He wants you to approach a particular activity? How can we best "hear" Him?
8. Should we always talk to Jesus before witnessing? Why or why not?

6 CLOSING

SUMMARY

In your own words, conclude with the following ideas:

Once Paul had been converted, he couldn't keep quiet. He'd had such an experience with God that he had to share, and nothing could stop him.

There is no one right way to witness for Jesus. Everyone has different personalities and talents. What is challenging and difficult for one person is perfectly natural for another. Only you, with the help of God, your parents, teachers, and pastor, can decide which witnessing activities are appropriate for your personality.

In the end, what matters is that we're living for God and loving Him with all the energy we have. When we do that, others might see us as foolish. They might even make fun of us. If they do, we're in good company. People accused the disciples, filled with the Holy Spirit, of being drunk. They said Jesus was a glutton and a drunkard. They may not understand us, but that's not our problem. The only important thing is to get out there and share. God will be with you and help you. He will use your witnesses for His kingdom.



STUDENT LESSON

GOD'S WITNESSES

Heroes of Faith: Paul

September 9, 2023

Sabbath FOR STUDY

- » **Memory Text:** " 'Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen" (Matthew 28:19, 20, NKJV).
- » **Our Beliefs, no. 17, Spiritual Gifts and Ministries:** "According to the Scriptures, these gifts include such ministries as faith, healing, prophecy, proclamation, teaching, administration, reconciliation, compassion, and self-sacrificing service and charity for the help and encouragement of people."
- » Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 20, 21

HEROES OF FAITH: PAUL

"After Jesus Himself, the apostle Paul was the most powerful and most influential voice in the Christian church. Paul was born in an ultra-conservative Jewish family in the Greek city of Tarsus, in the southern section of Asia Minor. Growing up in two worlds, Greek and Jewish, uniquely prepared Paul for his later work of proclaiming the gospel.

"As Paul told an assembly of Pharisees and Sadducees, 'I am a Pharisee, the son of a

Pharisee' (Acts 23:6, NKJV). The Pharisees were the strictest of all Jews and fierce persecutors of Christians. They were militant in the protection of Jewish orthodoxy.

"About A.D. 35, just five years after Jesus' crucifixion, Paul journeyed to Damascus with letters from the high priest, declaring that Christians were criminals worthy of death. He was probably about 30 years old at the time. God chose that moment to change the entire course of Paul's life. The Lord appeared to him in a vision, declaring, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' (Acts 9:4).

"Blinded by the glorious light, prostrate on the ground, Paul could only ask, 'Who are You, Lord?' A voice came from heaven: 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting' (verse 5).

"Paul was never the same again. Meeting Jesus transformed his life. He committed his entire life to proclaiming the Christ he loved.

"The apostle Paul was compelled to share his faith as widely as possible. He centered his efforts on the major cities of Asia Minor. He traveled the Mediterranean world from his hometown in Tarsus throughout Syria, Arabia, Greece, and Turkey. His first missionary journey, beginning in Antioch, took him on a 1,200-mile trek preaching the Word. His next journeys took him yet farther. On these frequent journeys he was stoned, beaten with rods, imprisoned, shipwrecked, hunted by wild beasts, robbed, and left for dead. But he kept witnessing for his Lord (2 Corinthians 11:24-27).

"Paul's faith made a difference. His commitment to Jesus transformed his life. To Paul, faith

was an active, dynamic, living reality that led him to share the Christ he loved with everyone he met.

“Does your faith make a difference in your life? Is it the transforming power that influences everything you do? Is the living Christ the center of your life as He was Paul’s?”

“Today, let the living, loving, life-transforming Christ be the center of your life too” (Mark Finley, *Solid Ground* [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2003], p. 210).

When we surrender to Christ and allow Him to use us, not only will we grow, but we will see great things happen!

Sunday RESPONDING

- » Read 1 Peter 3:15.
- » Your youth group is going to sing, with mikes and speakers and everything, in the local park as an outreach for your city. You’re not much of a singer, and you know that kids from school hang out at that park. What will they think of you? Should you conquer your fear and go?
- » Some witnessing activities will make you feel uncomfortable. Should you do them anyway? Why or why not? How can you tell if you’re stepping out of your comfort zone or participating in an activity that’s just not right for you?

Monday BIBLE ANSWERS ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND MINISTRIES

- » Read 1 Corinthians 12:7-11; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Peter 4:10, 11.
- » Everyone has received from God talents, gifts, and abilities that are unique to each individual. Will you develop your gifts and abilities to be used to help others come to

know Christ? What a blessing it is to use our individual talents as a witness for Christ! And to one day see souls in God’s kingdom because of how we let God use us!

- » How will you use your talents, gifts, and abilities this week as a witness for Christ?

- » “Every one who loves God is to testify of the preciousness of His grace and truth” (Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 92).
- » Find and fill in the missing sections. The scripture is from the New King James Version.

“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, _____: if prophecy, _____ in proportion to our faith; or ministry, _____; he who teaches, _____; he who exhorts, _____; he _____; he _____; _____; he _____, _____; _____” (Romans 12:6-8).

Tuesday REFLECTING

- » Read Mark 16:15.
- » Some teens are about making a statement with external things to show who they are (clothes, hair, friends, possessions, activities, music). Usually this type wants to be noticed. Others are trying not to stick out. They prefer not to be noticed. They like to work in the background. Have you figured out which one you prefer?
- » Sometimes this choice is conscious, driven

by a desire to be unique and to express yourself or by a fierce longing not to be noticed. Your choice will depend largely on your personality. It will affect how you fit in and deal with life, not only in school, but also at church. You may already notice that some youth group activities make you feel shy and uncomfortable, while others get you excited about sharing Christ with others. You can use these feelings to begin to figure out your own personal witnessing style.

- » God asks us to witness for Him, but He doesn't tell us how we have to do it. We can be joyous and outgoing for His cause or we can do radical, behind-the-scenes work and let others make the really big splashes. It all depends on where we feel most comfortable. Every now and then it can be beneficial—and fun!—to stretch the limits of your comfort zone. You might even find something new that you enjoy participating in. Usually, though, we're most effective doing what we feel comfortable with.
- » Now is a great time to explore witnessing and to discover your style. Take a few witnessing risks. Try something you may not have tried before or think you wouldn't be comfortable doing, such as singing in the youth group or passing out literature at the mall. Dare to step out in faith for God and see what happens. Remember, you are never alone. Besides, you may discover a witnessing style you never knew you had.

Wednesday BIBLE INSIGHTS

- » Look up the following texts. In them you will find answers to the following questions. Answers will be found using the New King James Version.

Hebrews 11:7 Hebrews 10:37-39
Mark 16:15 Luke 6:20-23
Luke 19:9, 10 Philippians 3:8
Philippians 1:21

1. What did Noah do by faith?

2. How should the "just" live?

3. Where and to whom should we preach the good news?

4. Whom did the Son of man come to seek and to save?

5. Why was Paul glad to let things be lost from his life?

6. What does Paul say is to live?

7. And to die?

8. What are the reasons you should "rejoice" and "leap for joy"?

Thursday CONNECTING

- » Read Ephesians 6:10-19.
- » Review the memory text.
- » When it comes to sharing your faith, you'll find most people have an opinion about how it should be done. You could face criticism from those who think you are too forward, not forward enough, too radical, not radical enough, too safe, or not safe enough. But remember—how you share your faith is between you and God.

- » If you receive criticism about how you witness to others, talk to people you trust: your parents, pastor, and youth group leader. Get their advice. Be open to suggestions. But if the criticism is not constructive, they can support you and help you.
- » Remember that when you are witnessing, you're out on the front lines of the battle between Christ and Satan. In a war the soldiers on the front lines are under the heaviest fire and in the gravest danger. In a spiritual battle it's the same. Satan's heaviest attacks will fall where God's people are doing the most good. Prepare for this by praying. Only prayer and open communication with God will be effective against Satan's attacks. But the good news is that this war is already won.

Friday
APPLYING

- » Read Philippians 1:21.
- » Take the comfort zone challenge. List three witnessing opportunities that are available to you right now.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

- » Now choose one that you consider to be a stretch, something you would not ordinarily like or feel really comfortable doing. During the next week, do it and write your reflections below.

What I did: _____

What I thought about it: _____

Rate this activity on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being "new fave," 10 being "never try again")

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

If all goes really well, or not so well, try repeating the challenge and choosing a different activity this time.

