

Discover Bible Studies

#17: The Secret of Growth through Sharing

Larry was enjoying pleasant conversation, Japanese tea, and rice crackers at Mr. Komori's house when the other guests began taking out their Bibles. They all looked at him expectantly. "Could you please give us our study now?" Mr. Komori asked.

Larry almost choked on his tea. He'd thought this get-together was just to have fun. And now he couldn't think of a thing to say.

Larry had actually taught many Bible classes at the Christian English language school in Japan where he worked. But they were all well-planned. He could give out information on the Bible with ease. But to just talk about God spontaneously . . . that was different.

Larry had heard all the Bible stories since childhood. But they meant very little to him on a personal basis. He'd been doing things He knew were wrong in God's eyes. How could he talk to others about a God he himself didn't really know?

Now, sitting there on the sofa, surrounded by expectant people, his charade was about to collapse. In that moment of fear, a verse flashed into his mind about the Holy Spirit giving us words to say when we are brought before people to give witness (Luke 12:12). He uttered a desperate prayer for help and latched onto the most familiar story he could think of: the Prodigal Son.

As he described how much God loves even those who wander away from Him, Larry found himself speaking straight from the heart. His words were sinking in. For the first time in his life Larry realized how much God loved him.

That night Larry knelt by his bed and committed his life to a God who'd finally become real. Sharing God's love had made it much more than just a familiar abstraction. It was now a fact that overwhelmed him.

1. JESUS CHALLENGES US TO GROW BY SHARING

The disciples had spent three and a half years taking in Christ's words and actions, and finally His death and resurrection. As Jesus was about to return to heaven, He commissioned the disciples to be His personal representatives:

"YOU WILL RECEIVE POWER when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and YOU WILL BE MY

WITNESSES . . . to the ends of the earth." -Acts 1:8. (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)

When Christ's followers gave their hearts unreservedly to Him at Pentecost, the risen Christ transformed their lives through the power of the Spirit. They became witnesses, not only to Christ's bodily resurrection and ascension, but also to His resurrection power that had changed their lives.

As Christians we too are witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus because we have experienced His renewing power in our own lives.

"But because of his great love for us, GOD, who is rich in mercy, MADE US ALIVE WITH CHRIST even WHEN WE WERE DEAD IN TRANSGRESSIONS-it is by grace you have been saved. AND GOD RAISED US UP WITH CHRIST . . . IN ORDER THAT . . . HE MIGHT SHOW THE INCOMPARABLE RICHES OF HIS GRACE, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." Ephesians 2:4-7.

We have been made alive with Christ, so we can "show the incomparable riches of His grace." And He asks us to take the good news of what He can do in a human life to all the world, then promises to go with us as we do so (Matthew 28:19-20).

H.M.S. Richards, the founder of the Voice of Prophecy radio ministry, once testified: "I have seen the change in the hearts of people who have heard the gospel of Christ. I have travelled in lands where the name of God and of Christ was never known until His church took the gospel there. I have seen these people changed from filth to cleanliness, from disease to health, from constant fear of evil spirits to joy in Christian living. I have seen the change in the status of womanhood. I have seen true Christian homes emerge from pagan darkness. In every land that I have visited I have seen lives changed. I know that 'the gospel of Christ . . . is the power of God unto salvation' (Romans 1:16). I know that when the church proclaims the gospel message, changes take place in human hearts and in human homes, and they are visible in the lives of those who respond to its appeal."

God has given to us weak human beings a special part to play in this exciting work, because sharing is a vital part of our growth. In order for our faith to remain healthy, it must be expressed. As Larry discovered so dramatically, sharing our faith helps us experience it more fully, and causes us to grow.

2. WE SHARE CHRIST BY THE WAY WE LIVE

A young man who'd grown up in an abusive home once observed: "I looked at my parents who by their example gave me a distorted image of God; I never had the example of someone with skin on who loves me." People around us desperately need someone who will give them a healthy picture of God. They need someone "with skin on" who will

demonstrate godly qualities. Our most powerful sermon is often simply the way we live. Before a person cares how much you know, they must know how much you care. Peter urges us:

"LIVE SUCH GOOD LIVES among the pagans [non-Christians] that . . . THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD DEEDS AND GLORIFY GOD. . . . because CHRIST SUFFERED FOR YOU, LEAVING YOU AN EXAMPLE THAT YOU SHOULD FOLLOW IN HIS STEPS." -1 Peter 2:12, 21.

Since "Christ suffered" for us at Calvary, we have an example of sacrificial love very close at hand. That love, reproduced in us as loving acts to others, can become a powerful force drawing unbelievers into the arms of Christ.

3. WE SHARE CHRIST BECAUSE OF THE WAY WE THINK

When the Devil ambushed Jesus in the wilderness with his appeals to appetite, pride, and presumption, Jesus fought back successfully by quoting from Scripture (Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). Christ was prepared because He had filled His mind with Bible truths. That's where the battle is won or lost-in our minds.

"For as [a person] thinketh in his heart, so is he."-Proverbs 23:7, KJV.

Growing Christians think heavenward. They concentrate on the healthy qualities they are trying to acquire.

"Rejoice in the Lord always . . . in everything, BY PRAYER and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will GUARD YOUR HEARTS AND YOUR MINDS in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is TRUE, whatever is NOBLE, whatever is RIGHT, whatever is PURE, whatever is LOVELY, whatever is ADMIRABLE if anything is EXCELLENT or PRAISEWORTHY- think about such things. . . . And the God of peace will be with you." -Philippians 4:4-9.

What we feed our minds makes all the difference. Garbage in, garbage out. God's Word in, God's life out.

4. WE SHARE CHRIST BY THE WAY WE LOOK

As a representative of Christ, the Christian will be modest even about how he or she looks, avoiding all kinds of extremes.

"If any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over . . . when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, THE UNFADING BEAUTY OF A GENTLE AND QUIET SPIRIT, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way . . . [those] who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful." -1 Peter 3:1-5.

Simplicity in dress and adornment has always marked genuine Christ-likeness. Ideally, others should be attracted to us as Christians not by the statement we make about fashion, but by the statement our lives make about Jesus.

5. WE SHARE CHRIST BY THE WAY WE ACT

The historian Edward Gibbon tells us that when Galerius sacked the camp of the Persians, a shining leather bag filled with pearls fell into the hands of a looting soldier. This man carefully preserved the useful bag, but threw away the precious pearls.

People who cling to the superficial thrills the world can offer up-while discarding Jesus, the Pearl of Great Price-are in even worse shape than the looting soldier. It's not just a fortune that can slip through our hands, but eternal salvation. So Scripture warns us:

"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world-the cravings of sinful man [appetite], the lust of his eyes [love of the world], and the boasting of what he has and does [pride]-comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever." -1 John 2:15-17.

Satan works hard to gold-plate the most destructive sins and the worst habits. Advertising for alcoholic drinks shows only young, beautiful, hard-working, intensely happy people. We never see anyone who resembles a pathetic figure stumbling out of the liquor store with a paper sack in their hands.

We have to be careful of associations that compromise our Christian principles (2 Corinthians 6:14). Christ does, of course, want us to keep reaching out to non-Christian friends. Personal relationships are the primary means through which faith is shared. Just make sure that your associates are not dragging you back into the old way of life.

What we take into our lives, even the entertainment we choose, has an impact on our spiritual life. We need to be conscious of what we're feeding our minds.

"I will set before my eyes no vile thing." -Psalm 101:3.

If we feed our souls on the best, the worst won't be able to drag us down to its level. Holding to higher standards in the things we let into our homes and minds won't narrow our lives. The Christian has more to make him happy than anyone else.

"YOU WILL FILL ME WITH JOY in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." Psalm 16:11.

6. WE SHARE CHRIST BY THE WAY WE GIVE

As he was about to baptize a new believer, the late Pastor H.M.S. Richards noticed that the man still had a well-filled billfold in his pocket. Richards asked if he'd forgotten to leave his

money in the dressing room. "My pocketbook and I will be baptized together," the man explained. He had caught the true spirit of Christianity-giving to help others. Christians grow by giving, and that is why "Jesus himself said: `It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35).

What we give to advance God's kingdom retains an eternal value.

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But STORE UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES IN HEAVEN. . . . For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." -Matthew 6:19-21.

As you give, remember: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (Psalm 24:1), including the silver and gold (Haggai 2:8). We ourselves belong to God, because He created us and because He rescued us from our sins by paying the price for our sins with His blood (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). Everything we own belongs to God, because He gives us "the ability to produce wealth" (Deuteronomy 8:18).

How much does our crucified and risen Lord invite us to share with Him for giving the gospel to others?

"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' 'IN TITHES AND OFFERINGS. . . . Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.

Test me in this,' says the LORD Almighty, 'and see if I WILL not THROW OPEN THE FLOODGATES OF HEAVEN and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.'" -Malachi 3:8-10.

Tithe is a "tenth" of our "increase" (Deuteronomy 14:22, KJV; Genesis 28:22). For the farmer or merchant the increase is income after deducting business expenses. For the employee, it is the total wage. The principle of tithing is a moral principle because it involves character. By failing to tithe we "rob" God. The tithe belongs to God and is to be used exclusively for supporting Christ's ministry (1 Corinthians 9:14), and finishing His work on earth so He can return (Matthew 24:14).

When Jesus came to live among us, He gave approval to tithing in New Testament times (Matthew 23:23).

How much should we give in offerings? Offerings are a matter of individual decision. Each person "should give what he has decided in his heart to give" (2 Corinthians 9:5-7). You can't out give God:

"Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap." -Luke 6:38.

H.M.S. Richards once related this experience:

"A lifelong gambler attended my meetings in Los Angeles, and I shall never forget the time I talked with him alone in the rear of the auditorium. He took a roll of bills from his pocket, \$500, and gave them all to me, saying, 'This is my first tithe.'

"The man was not well, and he had done nothing but gamble for 30 or 40 years, so I said, 'How are you going to live?'

"He replied, 'I have only five or six dollars left, but this other belongs to God.'

"Then I asked, 'What will you do?'

"'I don't know,' he answered, 'but I know that I must pay my tithe to God, and He will take care of me.'

"And God certainly did. The man's repentance was sincere. He went all the way in his consecration and was happy in his Christian life. And God provided for him to the day of his death." God does not promise that all faithful believers will grow rich. But we have the assurance that our Maker will supply life's necessities.

Christ gave everything for us. Let's give our hearts completely to Him now. Let's share Christ with others by the way we live, think, look, act, and give. Why not discover the joy of sharing Christ with others and of growing in His wonderful grace?

Copyright (c) 2000 by The Voice of Prophecy
Box 53055, Los Angeles, CA 90053