

Nicky Gumbel tells the story of a man who became a Christian. Being timid, he asked the man who led him to Christ if he had to tell anyone about his conversion. Since he didn't want to scare this new convert into backing out of the commitment he had just made, he said "*No, you don't have to witness to anyone. It can be our secret.*" Satisfied with that answer, the man went home. But as he spoke to God in prayer, studied his Bible, went to worship services, was generous with his time, talents, and treasure, and participated in acts of service, he found that he couldn't help but tell others about his faith. Which is why the man who led him to Christ said he didn't have to tell anyone. For he knew that if that new convert continued down the "*Path of Discipleship*," the Holy Spirit would eventually begin to compel him to also take the step of "*witness.*"

That is because while we may be inclined at first to keep our relationship with Christ to ourselves, if we continue to faithfully walk with God there will come a time when He will begin to nudge us to speak on His behalf. There will be moments when He begins to prod us to proclaim what He is doing in our world. And there will be situations where He begins to push us to share the "good news" of what He is doing in our soul. Which is something we generally want to do.

For while some of us are introverts, and don't find it energizing to be in large crowds, few of us are hermits and don't want relationships with at least a few close friends. And when good things happen in our lives, we therefore naturally want to share that good news with our friends.

If we get a new phone, for instance, we want to say to our friends "*Look at my new phone. It does all kinds of things my old phone couldn't.*" Or if we get a new car, we want to say to our friends "*Check out my new ride. It has GPS. Satellite radio. It even parks itself.*" But when it comes to witnessing to our relationship with God, that inclination can lessen. And one reason for that may be our fallen human nature. That is because the steps down the "*Path of Discipleship*" we have looked at so far don't glaringly reveal the state of our soul. When we pray, study our Bible, and worship, people don't know if we are sincerely seeking God. And if we seem generous, and participate in acts of service, people don't know if we are a "*cheerful*" giver or a "*begrudging*" giver. But when it comes to witnessing to our relationship with God, we realize that people will know about our walk with God because it will be revealed in what we say.

Which can make us reluctant to take this step. We may worry we don't know enough about the Bible to share what it says with others. We may fret we don't understand God well enough to tell others about Him. And we may fear people will not want to hear what we have to say, thinking we are not as righteous as we should be. But we may be thinking such things because the step of "*witness*" has come to have a bad image in our minds. For maybe when we think of this step, we envision having to knock on a stranger's door, or convince a devout atheist to accept Jesus as their Savior. And maybe we then think that only those who are perfect saints can do such things.

But those are mistaken notions of what the step of "*witness*" calls us to do, and totally incorrect assumptions about who God calls to be His witnesses. That is because while this step is called "*evangelism*," the images we have about that word may be tied too closely to certain methods of evangelism. For yes, knocking on doors is one way some have chosen to "*witness.*" And others

have felt called to speak to strangers who don't know Jesus to help them enter into relationship with Him. But the step of "*witness*" (which we speak about in our mission statement in the phrase "*introduce people to Jesus Christ*") is broader than just those methods, and includes many more people than just those who feel holy enough to do scary things like talking to strangers.

We see this broader reality of the step of "*witness*" in the worship services of many African American Churches. For in many of those services, the preacher will ask "*Can I get a witness?*" And someone, or several some ones, will shout "*Amen!*" in response. And what they are saying "*Amen*" to might be the preacher's statement that "*We are all sinners.*" Or "*God forgives us.*" Or that "*living in holy ways is the path to joy.*" In doing so, those saying "*Amen!*" are testifying that such things are true in their lives. For that is what the step of "*witness*" is about: sharing with others the fact that God has brought about something good in our lives.

This is last in the list of the steps down the "*Path of Discipleship*" not only because it can be the hardest for us to take however. It is last because it is also the culmination of what God wants us to do in our walk with Him. For without this step, we cannot truly be like God. Without this step, we cannot grow fully back into God's image. And without this step, we cannot fulfill the very calling we have as disciples of Jesus. For Jesus commissioned His followers to "*go, and make disciples . . . teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*" And as followers of Jesus, this is still OUR "Great Commission."

The Apostle Paul spoke of this fact when he asked the followers of Jesus in Rome how those who don't know of God's love can respond to it if they have never been told the story of Jesus. And then he gave the answer to that question by telling them that it is only by the followers of Jesus taking the step of witness. For "*how, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?*" Paul asked them, "*and how can they believe in one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?*" That is because like Jesus, Paul knew that it is not enough for us to merely let God into our hearts. He understood that it is not sufficient to show acts of mercy toward those in need. And he realized that if people around us are going to benefit from God's love like we have benefitted, they need to hear about His love from us.

We see this in a parable Darrell Robinson wrote that is similar to the Fishing Club video. The parable is about a group of men who gather to talk about fishing. But through the years, all they actually do is declare to everyone willing to listen that fishing is the primary task of anyone who wants to be 'a fisherman.' They never actually get around to fishing. But then one day, someone responds to their words about going out to fish. And he not only goes out to fish, he catches fish. Word of his feat spreads, and he is invited to speak at fishing club meeting houses around the world. But unfortunately, he too ends up never fishing again.

That parable is in many ways the story of too many Christians. For while each of us has come to faith in Jesus because someone took the step of "*witness*" in their walk with God (taking us to Sunday School as a child or inviting us to come to church as an adult), too many Christians don't then continue down the "*Path of Discipleship*" in their relationship with God by taking the step of

“*witness*” themselves. They take the steps of prayer, worship, and Bible study. But then they sit down in their walk with God. They take the steps of generosity and service. But no one would know it because they do so in secret. Which can be because they seek to be humble, and don’t want recognition. But sometimes it is because they are afraid to take the step of “*witness*.”

That is because if anyone knew they did such things, they might ask why. And that can be scary because if we take the step of “*witness*” by sharing with others the ways God is moving in our lives through prayer, and worship, Bible study and giving, as well as acts of service, it will reveal how we are (or are not) walking with God. Which may cause us to fear that our walk with God is not everything it should be. But here’s what we need to remember about that fear: none of us can be a good disciple of Jesus. None of us can be a perfect follower of God. None of us can be righteous, compassionate, and loving in our own will and strength.

In our natural state, we are sinners. We are children of Adam and Eve. And because of our spiritual imperfections, the perfect “image” of God we were created to have has been tarnished. Which is the bad news. It is also what we see play out in the passage from Luke that was read, a passage typically read on Palm Sunday as we move into Holy Week and remember what Jesus did on the cross. For Luke tells us that as Jesus was coming into Jerusalem, people who should have been able to recognize Him as God incarnate in human flesh were nevertheless unwilling to hear in His words the voice of the One they claimed was their Heavenly Father.

But before we are too hard on them, we need to remember their failures can also our failures. And their unwillingness to walk with God down the “*Path of Discipleship*,” can also display our unwillingness to walk with God. Particularly if we refuse to take the step of “*witness*.” For along with each of the other steps, we have been commissioned to take this step. We have been charged to proclaim “*everything*” Jesus commands us to do. And we have been called to share with those we know who don’t know God the wonderful things He does in our lives when we take the steps of prayer, worship, Bible study, generosity and service.

Going back to Paul’s words in Romans 10, using the imagery of what “The Fishing Club” we call the Church is meant to be, and tying those words and that image to Jesus’ words in Luke that if we fail to do our part in witnessing, God will find others to bring people into relationship with Him (which is what he meant when He said “*the stones will cry out*”) we might therefore ask “*How can fish be caught without bait? How can fish bite the bait unless they see it? How will fish see the bait unless it is put in the water? And how will the bait get into the water unless a fisherman goes to the lake?*” But “*going to the lake*” can be a daunting task for us frail people!

In our fallen human state, we prefer to have the fish come to us. In our sinfulness, we want them to sit down next to us in the pew without having to invite them to join us. And with the “image” of God we are supposed to display in how we behave tarnished, we want to find easy ways to fulfill the Great Commission, ways that don’t involve the scary step we call “*witness*.” But such unrealistic things are never going to happen. People only come to faith because other people invite them to “*come and see*” as Nathaniel said to Peter after telling Him He had met the Messiah. And that hasn’t

changed.

2,000 years later, we still have an “Andrew” role to play in the process of evangelism. And it begins with us taking the step of “*witness*” so God can bring people into relationship with Him through us. Which doesn’t mean we have to be eloquent. It doesn’t mean we have to be a great communicator. And it doesn’t mean our walk with God has to be at some saintly level where people around us consider us to be a holy prophet. To help you see how simple the step of “*witness*” can be, I want to tell you about two people.

The first person is Jack. Jack is a fictional character. But imagine that Jack is 88 years old. Imagine that Jack has been a church member for 80 of those years, attending since his parents first took him to Sunday School to hear about Jesus. But over those 80 years, Jack has never told anyone about Jesus. Jack has never shared His relationship with God with anyone. And Jack has never invited anyone to come to anything, not church, not Bible study, not even a church dinner.

The second person is Ella. Ella is a real person. Ella is 8 years old. Ella attends Sunday School here at Christ. And Ella, at 8 years old has already taken the step of “*witness*” by inviting a friend to come to Sunday School to hear about Jesus. And not only did Ella’s friend come, she brought her brother, her sister, her mother, and her father.

So here is my challenge to you. While Jack is a fictional character, he does represent all too many Christians. So don’t be like Jack. Be like Ella. Take the step of “*witness*” this very week by inviting someone to come with you to church next Sunday to hear how Jesus rose from the dead, and why that fact was good news for not just you, but also for them.