



Part 2: Lesson 11

Cultivating the Good Soil: You and the World

Fertile Soil: Starting Your New Life with Jesus



Light is essential for life. The light from the sun makes everything visible during the day. Even at night, a small light pushes the darkness away so that we can see clearly. Light guides us so we know the way to go, and it warns us from something unseen that could harm us. **Light is good.** When God created the world, on the first day, He created light. *And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day (Genesis 1:3-5).*

Light’s intended purpose is to be seen. Jesus said, “**You are the light of the world.** A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16). “No one lights a lamp and hides it in a clay jar or puts it under a bed. Instead, they put it on a stand, so that those who come in can see the light” (Luke 8:16).

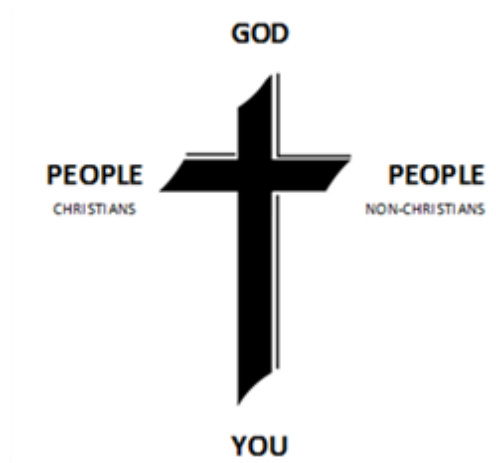
You are a light. This is one of the greatest compliments that Jesus gave to us. He calls us “**the light of the world.**” He calls us to be what He claimed to be—a light. Jesus said, “*As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world*” (John 9:4-5). “*The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness*” (John 12:45-46).

When Jesus called us “*the light of the world,*” it is because **He wants us to reflect God’s glory** just as He did. For God, who said, “*Let light shine out of darkness,*” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6).

No one lights a lamp and hides the light. In the same way, don’t hide your light. **Let your light shine for the world to see.**

The last lesson said that **you are not only a Christian for your sake, but also for the sake of others.** Your relationship with the “world” is another essential part of your relationship with God.

What an honor Christ has given you to be His light to the world. He said, “*As the Father has sent me, I am sending you*” (John 20:21). Jesus also prayed for us, “*My prayer is not that you take them out of the world. . . . As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world*” (John 17:15, 18).



YOUR GROWTH GOAL



In this lesson, you will learn:

- 1) How to give your personal testimony
- 2) How to present the Good News of Jesus Christ.



Before you go any further, stop and ask God to help you understand His Word, to help you experience His presence, and to become the light He wants you to be.

A PERSONAL TESTIMONY (Acts 26:1-29)



Read the following personal testimony by the Apostle Paul about his life and encounter with Jesus. He is defending his faith before a king and a governor. Make some observations about his story.

Then Agrippa said to Paul, “You have permission to speak for yourself.”

So Paul motioned with his hand and began his defense: “King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense against all the accusations of the Jews, and especially so because you are well acquainted with all the Jewish customs and controversies. Therefore, I beg you to listen to me patiently.

“The Jewish people all know the way I have lived ever since I was a child, from the beginning of my life in my own country, and also in Jerusalem. They have known me for a long time and can testify, if they are willing, that I conformed to the strictest sect of our religion, living as a Pharisee. And now it is because of my hope in what God has promised our ancestors that I am on trial today. This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night. King Agrippa, it is because of this hope that these Jews are accusing me. Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the dead?

“I too was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And that is just what I did in Jerusalem. On the authority of the chief priests I put many of the Lord’s people in prison, and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. Many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them punished, and I tried to force them to blaspheme. I was so obsessed with persecuting them that I even hunted them down in foreign cities.

“On one of these journeys I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. About noon, King Agrippa, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’

“Then I asked, ‘Who are you, Lord?’

“I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ the Lord replied. ‘Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

“So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and then to the Gentiles, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds. That is

why some Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles.

At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. "You are out of your mind, Paul!" he shouted. "Your great learning is driving you insane."

"I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable. The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do."

Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"

Paul replied, "Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."

What are some of your personal observations about this story?

How would you describe Paul's tone and manner when addressing the king and the governor, especially when he was challenged?

Why do you think that Paul told his story instead of preaching a sermon?

Do you think that his personal testimony was effective?

Verses 20, 22-23 say, *"I preached that they should repent and turn to God and demonstrate their repentance by their deeds. . . . But God has helped me to this very day; so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles."* ***How could you tell someone what it means to be a Christian from these verses?***

DIGGING DEEPER: SHARING YOUR PERSONAL TESTIMONY



At some point, just like Paul, you will be compelled to explain why you are a Christian and what you believe. Sometimes, this will be because people ask you questions or challenge your beliefs. Sometimes you will feel compelled by the Holy Spirit to tell others because you love God and the person.

Your personal story with Jesus is one of the most effective ways to share God's love.

What message does your life say to the world about Christ? By this time, you are seeing changes in your life and beliefs as Jesus is transforming you. This should encourage you. People will also see these changes and be curious, especially those who are close to you such as family and friends.

Be prepared to tell your story and how you came to faith. This will make it clear to them the real reason and avoid any misconceptions or false beliefs.

To help you prepare your personal testimony, write information about yourself and your life with Christ in the chart below. Use the categories and questions to help organize your thoughts.

BEFORE I RECEIVED CHRIST

How would you describe your life before you received Christ?

Were there circumstances or events in your life that caused you to search for something more?

HOW I RECEIVED CHRIST

When was the first time that you heard about trusting Jesus with your life?

Why did you finally decide to follow Christ?

How did you give your life to Christ?

AFTER I RECEIVED CHRIST

What are some changes you have seen in your life since becoming a Christian?

How is life different now?

How does your relationship with Christ affect your decisions, relationships, and activities?

Paul said this about the Christians in the city of Corinth, “*You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone*” (2 Corinthians 3:2). Your story is powerful and will help someone.

DIGGING DEEPER: SHARING THE GOOD NEWS (Acts 10:23-48)

The Bible urges all Christians to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. We must prepare ourselves to speak this message, truthfully and clearly. The Holy Spirit is at work to help you deliver this message. The Holy Spirit is also working in the other person to convict them of their need for Christ. Read this story about Peter from Acts 10:23-48 and how God used him to bring another person to Christ.

The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. But Peter made him get up. “Stand up,” he said, “I am only a man myself.”

While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. He said to them: “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?”

Cornelius answered: “Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me and said, ‘Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.’ So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.”

Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

“We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles. For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said, “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.” So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

How did the Holy Spirit prepare Cornelius and the other people to hear the message of Christ?

How did the Holy Spirit prepare you to hear and receive the message of Christ?

How does Peter describe Jesus?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

What did God command Peter and the disciples to do?

What happens when a person believes in Jesus?

Do you believe that God can use your life like Peter's?

THE GOOD NEWS

What do you need to communicate? You do not need to know everything about the Bible and the Christian faith to share the Good News. But you do need to know the core message of the Good News to be truthful and effective.

The earliest creed of the Church (*a creed is an authoritative statement of principal belief*) was “**Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters**” (1 Corinthians 15:3-6).

What is the principal message of the Good News that you must share? Write it in your own words below.

The Christian faith begins and ends with Jesus Christ. He died on the cross for our sins, and He rose again to new life. Jesus said, “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6). | Timothy 2:5-6 says, *For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people* (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

The Christian faith is not a collection of rules and regulations. It is living in a relationship with the risen Christ; a relationship with a personal God who cares very deeply about you. It is not enough to just know about these things. Every person must decide whether to surrender their life to Jesus. Scripture tells us, *God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).*

When you share your faith, either by testimony or presenting the Good News, allow your listener an opportunity to receive Jesus into their life. Ask them if they are willing to pray with you. The following is an example of a simple prayer:



Lord Jesus, I want to know you and your love. I need you, and I am sorry for my sins. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I trust you as my Savior and want to follow you as Lord, starting right now. I open my life to you and receive you as my Savior and Lord. Please come in. Make me the kind of person you want me to be. Guide my life and help me to do your will. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

GROWING OUTWARD: PREPARING TO BE CHRIST'S MESSENGER



Jesus' disciple John confidently stated, "*We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ*" (1 John 1:3). John was overjoyed that the God of the universe chose to have a relationship with him, a lowly, simple fisherman. He was so overjoyed that he wanted to share this joy with others so they might experience the same joy.

Scripture tells us, *But in your hearts revere 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, keeping a clear conscience (1 Peter 3:15-16).*

This next section contains some practical advice to help you become an effective witness for Jesus Christ. Study it and prepare yourself.



I. THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL HELP YOU

Jesus told His disciples,

“When the Advocate [the Holy Spirit] comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me” (John 15:26).

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Who helps you to become Christ’s witness?

You will find that the Holy Spirit will lead others to you. Sometimes your conversations will turn to Jesus. The Holy Spirit is working to help you. Also, when you present the Good News so that others may respond, you never need to coerce a decision. Once you have presented Christ in the power of the Spirit, leave the results to God.

2. BE YOURSELF

God wants to use you. There are as many ways to share the Good News as there are Christians who follow Jesus. You don’t need to be a pastor; you don’t need to have special gifts, a special social status, or wealth. Just be yourself. God uses ordinary people, and He will use your life as a light to others.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9).

3. PRAY

Pray for people that you know who don’t know Jesus, especially family members and friends. Ask God to open their hearts to receive Him. Ask God to open a way for you to present Christ to them.

The Apostle Paul asked for these kinds of prayers and gave some instructions. *Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone (Colossians 4:2-6).*

Take some time to think about some people that you know who need Jesus in their life. Write their names below.



Pray for these people often.

With your mentor and other followers, pray together, asking God to guide your steps, to strengthen and protect you, to provide for your daily needs, and to be an encouragement to others.

