

# LEARNING TO PRESENT A WINNING TESTIMONY

"And they overcame him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony." Revelation 12:11. Two things are mentioned in this verse of scripture as a means of conquering power: 1) the blood of the Lamb which purchased our salvation on Calvary and without which we would be hopeless, 2) another source of power which is rarely recognized or discussed, **the word of their testimony**. Those things which we affirm and verbalize have a powerful effect on our own experience. The Christian who puts his allegiance on the line again and again is building strength of holy character which will be a fortress when his soul is besieged by temptation and adversity.

**Testimony is  
source of power**

Every Christian ought to have a ready, vital testimony. A sad reality is that very few do. Among Seventh-day Adventists the word "testimony" is no doubt misunderstood. What we call "testimony meeting" usually has very little testimony in it. It would be more properly described as a meeting of thankfulness and prayer requests. ("I am thankful for . . . this . . . and that . . . and I want you all to remember me in your prayers, etc.") Testimony is really a statement of first-hand experiences, a witness given to personal knowledge.

**Testimony defined**

"Now we can look forward to the salvation God has promised us. There is no longer any room for doubt **and we can tell others that salvation is ours**. For there is no question that He will do what He says." Hebrews

**Spirit of Prophecy  
encourages testimonies  
of assurance**

10:23 (LNT). "It is your privilege to trust in the love of Jesus for salvation, in the fullest, surest, noblest manner; to say, He loves me, He receives me; I will trust Him, for He gave His life for me. Nothing so dispels doubt as coming in contact with the character of Christ. He declares, 'Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out'; that is, there is no possibility of My casting him out, for I have pledged My word to receive him. **Take Christ at His word, and let your lips declare that you have gained the victory.**" E. G. White, Review and Herald, February 1971.

The loss of this kind of certainty has probably contributed more to the ineffectiveness of our soulwinning work than any other one thing.

Seventh-day Adventists who believe the Spirit of Prophecy writings ought to rejoice in the assurance of eternal life more than any other people. There are so many wonderful statements to establish our faith in what Christ has accomplished for us.

"We should not make self the center, and indulge anxiety and fear as to whether we shall be saved." Steps to Christ, page 72. "The moment a sinner accepts Christ by faith, that moment he is pardoned. The righteousness of Christ is imputed to him, and he is no more to doubt God's forgiving grace." Signs of the Times, May 19, 1898.

**Leading souls to  
assurance will require  
new perspective  
for some**

It is essential for the soulwinner to understand that an individual may claim the assurance of salvation and eternal life, when he comes to Christ just as he is, with his sins and weaknesses, his enslaving habits and his guilt. Some entertain a great hesitation in leading a sinner, (particularly a backslider or one who is acquainted with the church and its teachings) to accept Christ as Saviour and to claim the assurance of salvation until he has reformed his life and got rid of those things that are an offense to God and His church. All would agree that it is the very essence of salvation to expunge these offenses from the life of the believer, but the difficulty lies in getting the cart before the horse. The salvation and eternal life come first, and the results follow.

This is evident from the examples that Jesus gave us: the adulterous woman, the thief on the cross, Zacchaeus and so on. The apostles followed the same practise of leading someone to accept Christ, claiming the assurance of salvation, and letting the genuineness of that profession manifest itself later in the reformed life. In Steps to Christ, page 31: "If you see your sinfulness, do not wait to make yourself better, how many there are who think they are not good enough to come to Christ. Do you expect to become better through your own efforts? 'Then may ye also do good who are accustomed to do evil?' There is help for us only in God. We must not wait for stronger persuasions, for better opportunities or for holier tempers. We can do nothing of ourselves. We must come to Christ just as we are." Now if we are to invite people to come to Christ just as they are, we must be prepared to assure them that Christ has received them and given them eternal life and made them His children. **"Some seem to feel that they must be on probation and must prove to the Lord that they are reformed before they can claim His blessing."** Steps to Christ, page 52. (And on the previous page these blessings have been defined as cleansing from sin, becoming the children of God and enabling us to live a holy life.) So, "we may ask for these blessings and believe that we receive them and thank God that we **have received them.**" **"They may claim the blessing of God even now.** They must have His grace, the Spirit of Christ to help their infirmities or they cannot resist evil. Jesus loves to have us come with all our weaknesses, our folly, our sinfulness and fall at His feet in penitence. It is His glory to encircle us in the arms of His love and to bind up our wounds and to cleanse us from all impurity." Steps to Christ, page 54.

**Righteousness by faith is for believers who are preparing for membership as well as members**

**Reformation not necessary before claiming assurance**

"Here is where thousands fail. They do not believe that Jesus pardons them personally, individually. They do not take God at His word. It is the privilege of all who comply with the conditions to know for themselves that pardon is freely extended for every sin. Put away the suspicion that God's promises are not meant for you. They are for every repentant transgressor." Steps to Christ, page 52.

**Eternal life begins  
with acceptance**

"As through Jesus we enter into rest, heaven begins here. We respond to His invitation, 'Come, learn of me'. **And in thus coming we begin the life eternal.**" Desire of Ages, page 331. We find the proper order of salvation and works on page 6- of Steps to Christ. "We do not earn salvation by our obedience; for salvation is the free gift of God, to be received by faith. But obedience is the fruit of faith."

**Reformation begins  
with assurance**

There are some earnest church members who feel that they are serving the Lord by throwing a cloud over this kind of assurance and certainty, by filling the mind with cautions and anxieties over our weaknesses and whether or not we shall lay hold on eternal life. Steps to Christ, page 53 says, "Satan is ready to steal away the blessed assurances of God." Such people are helping Satan not the Lord. Again on page 116 of Steps to Christ, "Satan is exultant when he can lead the children of God to unbelief and despondency. He delights to see us mistrust God, doubting His willingness and power to save us . . . Satan ever seeks to make the religious life one of gloom.

**Those who discourage  
assurance and make  
Christian life seem  
toilsome and difficult  
are assisting Satan**

**He desires it to appear toilsome and difficult and when the Christian presents in his own life this view of religion, he is through his unbelief seconding the falsehood of Satan.**" "Many walking along the path of life dwell upon their mistakes and failures, and disappointments, their hearts are filled with grief and discouragement."

The Lord wants us to radiantly declare with the apostle Paul, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day." He was persuaded "that the Lord who had begun a good work in him would complete it unto the day of redemption." He affirmed that God "would bring us off more than conquerors", "that He would always give us the victory" and "cause us always to triumph in Christ Jesus". On page 125 in Steps to Christ, "Then let us not cast away our confidence, but have firm assurance, firmer than ever before. 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us,' and He will help us to the end."

There is always the temptation for us to fall back into the rut of thinking that it is by performing the duties of the Christian life and obeying God that we will be saved. Steps to Christ page 44 and 45, "There are those who profess to serve God, while they rely upon their own efforts to obey His law, to form a right character, and secure salvation. Their hearts are not moved by any deep sense of the love of Christ, but **they seek to perform the duties of the Christian life as that which God requires of them in order to gain heaven. Such religion is worth nothing.**" We might add that such religion will never be able to rejoice in the assurance of eternal life. Any religion that reckons our own obedience or our own character as any part of the requirements for eternal life, will certainly be frustrated with uncertainty and doubt, for one will always be able to see in his life imperfection. Therefore, if he is **trusting** what **he is**, he will have **distrust** as he recognizes his imperfection. Only when he trusts what Christ has done to save him will he have perfect confidence, for there was no imperfection in His atonement for us. We are taught to have the assurance of salvation based entirely upon what Christ did and upon our acceptance of Him. Steps to Christ, pages 50 and 51, "In like manner you are a sinner. You cannot atone for your past sins, you cannot change your heart, and make yourself holy. But God promises to do all this for you through Christ. You **believe** that promise. You confess your sins, and give yourself to God. You **will** to serve Him. Just as surely as you do this, God will fulfill His word to you. If you believe the promise—believe that you are forgiven and cleansed—God supplies the fact; you are made whole, just as Christ gave the paralytic power to walk when the man believed that he was healed. It **is** so if you believe it.

**Inspired description of  
worthless religion**

**Where lack of  
assurance comes from**

"Do not wait to feel that you are made whole, but say, 'I believe it; it **is** so, not because I feel it, but because God has promised!'"

There is a beautiful prayer of acceptance which includes these certainties in Selected Messages,

**We can know  
we are saved now**

Book I, page 392, "The whole work is the Lord's from the beginning to the end. The perishing sinner may say: 'I am a lost sinner'; but Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. He says, 'I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance'. I am a sinner, and He died upon Calvary's cross to save me. **I need not remain a moment longer unsaved.** He died and rose again for my justification, and **He will save me now.** I accept the forgiveness He has promised."

Again in Selected Messages, Book I, page 373, **"It is essential to have faith in Jesus, and to believe you are saved through Him."**

**The caution is against  
"Once saved, always  
saved"**

Certainly no one can doubt that the Spirit of Prophecy and the Bible teach that we should have the happy and joyful assurance of salvation and eternal life. But there are those who are confused in their thinking by two or three places where Ellen White states, "There is danger in taking the the position that **many do take** in saying, 'I am saved' ". There is a similar caution in the book, Christ Object Lessons. Anyone reading the context of these statements will recognize that the Spirit of Prophecy teaches that we are not to say that we are saved in the sense that we can never be lost through rejection of Christ. In other words, we do not accept the Calvinistic position of "once-saved, always-saved". Neither do we believe that we are to sit back in false security feeling that there is no need to make progress and grow up into Christ. Such a life is a denial of our profession of Him. In one single sentence we read the essence of Ellen White's teaching on this matter. "It is essential to have faith in Jesus and to believe that you are saved through Him; but there is danger in taking the position that many do take in saying, 'I am saved'." Page 373, Selected Message, Book I. Obviously she is saying that a Christian without assurance of eternal life and salvation is a poor testimony. But on the other hand, the position that many do take in stating that they are saved and can never fall, etc. are not following the teachings of the Bible. While Seventh-day Adventists accept

the Arminian teaching that one who is saved can turn from the Lord and be lost, we do not believe or teach that one who through his human weakness and the temptations of Satan stumbles and falls is thereby rejected by the Lord and in a lost condition. We are not lost every time we make a mistake or fall in temptation, and then saved again when we confess that sin and receive forgiveness, **rather our relationship with Christ is an abiding relationship.** We have become a child of God through our acceptance of Him and we do not have an on-again, off-again sonship as some would have us believe. The Bible also likens our relationship with Christ to marriage, and using that analogy we should state clearly that we do not believe that our marriage with Christ ends in divorce every time we fall in temptation, anymore than our human marriage ends in divorce every time we fail to demonstrate a perfect love. "This union with Christ, once formed, must be maintained. Christ said, 'Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me'. This is no casual touch, no on and off connection. The branch becomes part of the living vine. The communication of life, strength, and fruitfulness from the root to the branches is unobstructed and constant." *Desire of Ages*, page 676.

"Even if we are overcome by the enemy we are not cast off, nor forsaken and rejected of God." *Steps to Christ*, page 64. "Christ will never abandon the soul for whom He died. The soul may leave Him and be overwhelmed with temptation, but Christ can never turn from one for whom He has paid the ransom of His own life." *Mount of Blessings*, pages 118 and 119.

What we need to realize is the difference between sins occasioned by human weakness and failure and the presumptuous sin of turning away from the Lord, which constitutes apostasy and a falling from grace. There is a very enlightening statement in *Steps to Christ*, page 72, "Satan will constantly present allurements to induce us to

**The relationship with Christ is an abiding relationship**

**Like marriage**

**We are not lost between sin and confession**

**The sin of apostasy can separate us from assurance**

break this tie—to choose to separate ourselves from Christ. **Here is where we need to watch, to strive, to pray, that nothing may entice us to choose another master; for we are always free to do this.** But let us keep our eyes fixed upon Christ, and He will preserve us. Looking unto Jesus, we are safe. Nothing can pluck us out of His hand." This is the sin of apostasy . . . choosing another master. This, of course, can take the form of any cherished indulgence, which becomes an idol to us, "another master", which we have chosen instead of Christ as Lord.

We are too prone to interpret our own and other's weaknesses as cherished sins and pass harsh judgment which brings gloom and discouragement. This kind of attitude always turns assurance into doubt. Obviously, such a view is not the spirit of the gospel as presented in the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy. Such thinking can never rejoice in the joy unspeakable and full of glory, the peace that passes understanding or know the fullness of the joy which Christ came to give.

**May be saved without assurance, but cannot be fruitful soulwinner**

Those Christians who anxiously plod the Christian way with these misunderstandings, and who lack the assurance of eternal life are not necessarily lost. Surely God in His mercy will bring many such into the bliss of heaven, but this much should certainly be clear to us:—that without the assurance of eternal life and without a clear understanding of these truths, a Christian cannot be a good witness for the Lord. He cannot be effective as a soulwinner. The necessary mood and spirit of a successful soulwinner is described in the Spirit of Prophecy article, *These Times*, October 1966. "If you do not feel light-hearted and joyous, do not talk of your feelings, cast no shadow upon the lives of others. A cold, sunless religion never draws souls to Christ. It drives them away from Him into the nets that Satan has spread for the feet of the straying." Again in *Steps to Christ*, page 120, "There are many who have an erroneous idea of the life and character of Christ. They think that He was devoid of warmth and sunniness, that He was stern, severe,



and joyless. In many cases the whole religious experience is colored by these gloomy views. . . . His heart was a wellspring of life; and wherever He went, He carried rest and peace, joy and gladness. . . . The religion of Jesus gives peace like a river. It does not quench the light of joy. It does not restrain cheerfulness, nor cloud the sunny, smiling face." "A cold, legal religion can never lead souls to Christ, for it is a loveless, Christless religion." Selected Messages, Book I, page 388. There are two qualities indispensable to successful soulwinning.

### **The winning personality of Christ**

**The first** we have quite thoroughly discussed, namely; a confident, trusting assurance in eternal life that Christ has given.

**The second** is the ability to communicate a warm affection and love to those we seek to reach for Christ. It is love that wins. "The love of Jesus will melt and win hearts when mere reiteration of doctrines will accomplish nothing." Desire of Ages, page 826. The apostle Paul in I Corinthians 13 says, "Though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and though I have faith to remove mountains and have not love in profits nothing." In discussing the power of love in the work of winning souls, "Love will gain the victory when argument and authority are powerless. It is melting and transforming in its influence and will take hold of the lives of the sinful and effect their hearts when every other means has proved unsuccessful.

### **Communicating love to the prospect**

"Whenever the power of intellect, of authority or of force is employed and love is not manifestly present, the affection and will of those whom we seek to reach assumes a defensive and repelling position and their strength of resistance is increased." Testimonies, Vol II, page 135. Many Bible studies have been given that have driven people further away from the Lord rather than drawing them closer to Him. Some will say, "Well, we love them or we wouldn't be working for them and they ought to be able to know that." We should rather feel an obligation to learn to communicate the love we feel for people

**Love  
Assurance  
Testimony**

**Testimony is the salt  
that makes the lost one  
thirsty for the  
living water**

so that there can be no doubt in the mind of anyone.

**Love** and **assurance** have been considered at length because they are the foundation of valid testimony. Without love, testimony and assurance can appear to be arrogant, boasting. Without assurance there is nothing to testify about, and love expressed without assurance has no promise, no hope.

**The power of Testimony**

The early Christians turned the world upside down because of the force of their personal testimony. "This Jesus which we have seen and heard, Him we declare unto you," they could say with confidence.

A whole city was turned around by the testimony of one man to whom Jesus said, "Go home to your friends and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you." And the scripture says, "He went throughout the whole city telling how much God had done for him." That city had begged Jesus to get out of town! It says they begged him to depart from them. Jesus left the city, but he left a man there with a testimony and a few weeks later when he returned the scriptures say a whole city was waiting for him and they welcomed him. So amazing had been the transformation that now they not only were ready to listen to Him, but they believed that He was the miracle-working Son of God. Here He was able to raise Jairus' daughter to life and here the woman was healed by a touch of faith, reaching through the crowd to touch the hem of his garment. Next to the word of God, a soulwinner's testimony is the most powerful tool he has.

On another occasion, the woman of Samaria led a city to Christ and the scripture relates that many believed on Him "because of her testimony". We could cite other examples from the Bible.

No doubt to many the very word "testimony":

has boring connotations. There is a sub-conscious recollection of some testimony meetings where repetitious and meaningless platitudes seemed never to end. We are not talking about that kind of testimony. We are talking about a humble, yet forceful and exciting telling of one's personal experience with Jesus Christ. An effective testimony will contain three essential elements:

- 1) What I was before I met Christ.
- 2) How I became a Christian.
- 3) What Jesus Christ has meant in my life.

### **Three essentials of good testimony**

Most people spend too much time talking about the first element of testimony and not enough talking about the second and third. People are not interested in a personal autobiography. They don't care about all of the little details of our early life. What is important is that we describe the fears, the uncertainties, the emptiness, the enslavement, the hopelessness that possessed us before we came to know what Jesus wanted to do for us. Take some time to sit down and think through the specific symptoms that plagued you before you received Christ as your Saviour:

- 1) Perhaps your inner anxieties brought on sickness.
- 2) Maybe it caused unhappiness in your home life.
- 3) Perchance it led you to experiment with drink or sinful pleasure in a vain search for fulfillment.

### **Be specific**

And then under point two, describe some of the specific things that led you to Christ, perhaps the people that had a part in it.

### **Make it real**

Then, of course, under point three . . . what your life has been like since you became a Christian:

- 1) The peace you have found,
- 2) the forgiveness from sin,
- 3) the joy of knowing that you will live forever in heaven,

## Make it live

- 4) the health and happiness,
- 5) genuine friendship you have been able to establish with others,
- 6) the fellowship of God's people.

These things stated in specific terms as much as possible, rather than in generalities.

The effects of this kind of testimony are that the prospect begins to have a strong desire to find the same experience, the same Saviour. "The gospel is to be presented not as a lifeless theory, but as a living force to change the life. God desires that the receivers of His grace shall be witness to His power. He would have His servants bear their testimony to the fact that through His grace men may possess Christlikeness of character and **may rejoice in the assurance of His great love.** He would have us bear testimony to the fact that He cannot be satisfied until the human race are reclaimed and reinstated in their holy privileges as sons and daughters of God. **His blessings He presents in the most alluring terms. He is not content merely to announce these blessings. He presents them in the most attractive way to excite a desire to possess them.** So His servants are to present the riches of the glory of the unspeakable gift." Desire of Ages, page 826. This instruction would surely indicate that we should not give a long list of the sacrifices we had to make, the things we had to give up, the hardships we faced in becoming a Christian. Instead we should emphasize the positive. "Go and tell how great things the Lord has done for thee."

**Don't put words in the mouth of the prospect by giving answers to the two questions**

There is one very important thing we need to remember in giving a testimony. **If we are going to present the gospel** to an individual we should not, in giving our testimony tell of our acceptance of Christ in such specific terms that we reveal to him the right answers to the questions that we will ask him in the presentation of the gospel. If we would do this, it would only make it impossible for us to really understand his spiritual condition.

If on the other hand, we are going to have an

opportunity only to give our testimony **without a presentation** of the gospel, we should make it very clear just how we accepted Christ and why we have the assurance that is ours.

We will probably never develop a good testimony to use in soulwinning work until we go to the effort of sitting down and writing it out. Only in this way can we properly polish it, removing denominational cliches and trite expressions that Christians commonly use. The Word of God says "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason for the hope that is within you". Every effective soul winner will obey this command and polish and develop his own personal testimony so that it can be used as a sharp tool in his work for God.