

"Credible Christianity"

Holiness

2 Peter 1:16-21

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Bruce: Good morning, men.

Men: Good morning.

Bruce: I just want to affirm something that Sig mentioned. What a thrill it is to see you young men here! I'm going to ask all you students. Would you stand up and let's just recognize these men. How great it is to have them here! Would you guys just stand up? *(Applause.)* Thank you very much, men. It's great to have you with us. I get very excited at seeing two and three generations of men here, because you, the next generation, are our future, and we're sure glad you're with us.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: Let's continue our study of 2 Peter. The Scripture that we'll have for our consideration and examination today will be found in 2 Peter chapter 1, beginning at verse 16 and reading down to the end of the chapter at verse 21. 2 Peter chapter 1, beginning at verse 16, again from the English Standard Version.

"For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. But we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to Him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased', we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with Him on the holy mountain. And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star arises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of men, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Bruce: Thanks be to God. Amen and Amen.

How many times have you asked yourself the question, how do I share my faith? How do I witness for Christ? What do I need to do? Which verses do I use? Do I start with this verse? Should I do this verse? Is there a plan I should use? What should I do when somebody wants to know about how I share my faith?

That's really what Peter is going to teach us today because he has given us such a wonderful example of his own life, of his own personal testimony of how he became involved with the Person and work of Christ and how he shared his own faith. And I think that Peter sets up a good model for us that I'd like us to examine today.

Now these are all important questions that we ask. Which verses should I use? When do I say this? Should I put this in front of that? What is the sequence? Those are very good and important issues. But the issue of testifying about your faith is really an issue about aiding someone in discovering that you have already credibly described your faith in your conduct.

Now we've learned from Peter that the sequence goes like this. Doctrine precedes practice, or doctrine precedes conduct. Now he's going to add another dimension to that. Doctrine precedes

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conduct, and conduct precedes communication or conversation. So Peter is going to walk us through how it works, because he has a wonderful example of how you and I need to put together the ability, as he talks about in 1 Peter chapter 3 verse 15, which is one of the key verses in this whole passage in our study of holiness, which is this. *"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect."*

Oftentimes we are prepared, but we don't do it with gentleness and respect. Now notice what he says. *"Always be prepared."* So how is it that you prepare when somebody asks you the question, "Why is it that you believe this?", or "How do you handle that?" What is your response? How do you go about that?

Peter is going to tell us that our conduct makes it credible. So what do you do once somebody recognizes your conduct which is different from theirs because it's holy—what do you do after somebody comes up and asks you, "How do you handle that?" Basically, you're put in a position now to give your testimony of your faith in the Person and work of Christ, to give an answer for the hope that's within you. They discern something about you because your conduct is relatively different from the rest of the world. And now they come to you and say, "What is it that makes you tick? How is it that you can do the things you can do? How can you handle that situation?" Peter is going to walk us through his own personal testimony and I think that it serves as a wonderful model for us.

Now notice verses 1-11. He dealt with the subject of the divinely implanted life, which we called the divine life—the divine power of living a holy life. You'll see that in verses 1-11.

And so he starts off with truth. The next thing, in verses 12-21, he deals with the basis of such claims and conduct that he talked about in verses 1-11.

And now he gives us his testimony. So his sequence is this—truth and then testimony. Doctrine precedes conduct. Conduct precedes conversation. That's going to be his model.

So there are three things we need to look at. Peter illustrates for us *the testimony of his personal participation*-- that's verse 16--*, the testimony of divine confirmation*—verses 17 and 18—and then *the testimony of divine revelation* in verses 19-21. So let's examine these three steps that Peter models for us, which I think is a very, very good system of being prepared to answer for the hope that somebody sees and asks you about because of your faith.

Now the reason Peter had such strong convictions about the power of God to provide the power to live a divine life is because it's described in verses 1-11. He was an eyewitness. Notice what he says in verse 16. *"We were eyewitnesses."* *"For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty."*

The first thing we need to talk about is your participation in the witness of your involvement in the Person and work of Christ. Now notice that he says, "we." He's referring to the apostles. They were eyewitnesses to the power of God, which they later experienced in their own daily lives. So they didn't make up what we would call these Jewish myths about Christ that he is referring to. Notice 1 Timothy 1:4.

Transcriber's Note: 1 Timothy 1:4. *"As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine,*

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nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith."

Bruce: Paul speaks essentially of these cleverly invented stories. He says, "We don't create stories. We don't make up things. This is my experience and not somebody else's."

The first thing we need to do, men, is to realize this—that people are asking you why you have hope. You want to give them the reason that *you* have hope. It's your own personal experience. That's where it starts. You don't create somebody else's experience.

How often have you heard, "Well, let me tell you about so and so. This guy was really in bad shape and God the Holy Spirit regenerated him. Now he has got a wonderful testimony." That's not what they're asking. They're asking *you* the question. What is it that gives you the hope in this situation? They want to hear from you. The very first thing that you need to talk about is your own personal experience and the power of God through the work of the Holy Spirit.

So they didn't work up these myths that he's referring to. Another time, you'll notice, in 2 Timothy 4, they refer to these things as "*made up fables*" in 1 Timothy 4:7, "*old wives' tales*" in 1 Titus 1:4, Jewish in character. In other words, rabbis in biblical times would take a name from a list of different people, different pedigrees, and they would expand it into a nice story. And that was known as the *hagada*, part of the Talmud. They would take somebody's story and they would make something out of it.

And what Peter was saying is, "We don't do that. We're not following the Jewish tradition of taking somebody's pedigree and making a nice, wonderful story out of it. We're going to give you our own personal eyewitness experience." "This is my experience," Peter says. And he says with all the apostles, "We were eyewitnesses of the power of God, which made a difference in my own life." The very first thing we start off with, men, is our own personal experience.

Participant: Bruce?

Bruce: Yes, please?

Participant: When he says, *personal experience*, or *eyewitness*, is that why we really don't call men or preachers or teachers *apostles* today? I've seen some denominations which have—

Bruce: There are no longer apostles anymore.

Participant: Right. But there are people who call themselves apostles.

Bruce: People call themselves a lot of things. (*Laughter.*)

Participant: But isn't that the main reason, because they weren't eyewitnesses?

Bruce: That's the definition of an apostle—that they were eyewitnesses to the Person and power of Christ. That's why it's important that Peter says this. The first thing you need to talk about is your own experience, not somebody else's.

So let's ask ourselves a couple of questions here. He gives his own personal testimony about his participation in the life of Christ.

So what is witnessing? You'll see this in your notes. One theologian says this. "The witness is to tell what he sees, what he hears, and what he feels." Notice 1 John 1:1. He tells us about what he saw, what he heard, what he touched and what he felt concerning Jesus Christ.

Transcriber's Note: 1 John 1:1. "*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life.*"

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Bruce: A good example is 1 John chapter 1 verse 1. This is what he felt. This is what he saw and what he heard and what he touched. This is what a witness is—someone who tells his experience with Christ. That's what we start off with. Remember, they're asking you the question. They're not asking you to tell the story of somebody else.

So what does it mean that you are witnessing about? What are you witnessing about? Here is another theologian who writes it this way. "In the New Testament Christ is pictured as being on trial before the world. The Holy Spirit is the Lawyer for the defense and is trying to convince the world that Jesus is the Christ. As the defense Lawyer, the Holy Spirit calls witnesses into the court of the world to give testimony to Jesus Christ. We are those witnesses that are called out by the Holy Spirit. What our lives say to the world either depicts Christ accurately, or undermines what the Holy Spirit is trying to accomplish. Our lives are an exemplary, important part of the case the Holy Spirit is building to present Christ to the world."

Now that's why somebody asks you the question, "Why do you have the hope that is within you?" So how do we become a witness? We become witnesses the moment that God regenerates us through the ministry of the Holy Spirit and changes our lives, and we become believers in the Person and work of Christ. You are now a witness. Through His regeneration you become a witness. You don't sit down and decide whether or not you're going to be a witness. You are already one because of God's work of regeneration. You are a witness.

The only question is whether or not you are going to be willing to stand up and give your testimony. Is it going to be positive or detrimental?

Here is the key ingredient. The key attitude of witnessing is that you care more about what the world thinks about Jesus Christ than you do about what the world thinks about you. That's the mindset we have to have. You've got to think this way. I'm more concerned about what the world thinks about Jesus Christ than of what I think the world thinks of me. You see, if I'm worried about what it thinks of me, I'm going to manufacture something else. But Peter says that this is his personal testimony, and that has got to be our own personal testimony. Do you understand what I mean when I say that you're more concerned about what the world thinks about Christ than what the world thinks about you? Do you understand what I mean by that? It means that you're going to tell the truth. They may reject it.

They may turn it off. But remember this. Somebody plants the seed. Somebody harvests the seed and somebody waters it. As a witness you are one of those three things. You just don't know which one it is. You might be the seed planter, giving your own personal testimony by your own personal testimony by your experience—what you felt, what you heard, what you saw, what you experienced in Christ. You may be the seed planter. You may be the somebody else who comes along and waters it. You may be the person who presides at the new birth when you harvest the crop. We just don't know that. But you are a witness to the work of regeneration of the Holy Spirit. You are a witness. And we are a witness to the world, and we need to be more concerned about what the world thinks about Christ than what the world thinks about you or me..

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: So where do you start? Well, you start with your own experience. You tell what happened to you. You tell how God drew you to Himself. You don't embellish it. You're a

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unique witness in defense of Christ. The Holy Spirit may call someone else up at a later time to do the watering, but you may be the person who plants the seed. You just don't know that.

So that means this, friends. You will always be successful when you witness for Christ because you're going to be one of three things—a seed planter, a waterier, or a harvester. You just don't know which one.

I was at a football reunion at the Naval Academy recently. And a friend of mine came up to see me. He said, "Bruce, I've been trying to track you down for about thirty years." (*Laughter.*) He said, "I just want you to know that when we were on the plane rides going to play football together, traveling together, and when we were studying our academic courses, you brought out your Bible and started reading the Scripture"

He said, "I always felt uncomfortable when you were reading the Scripture, because I don't know if I felt guilty, or I thought you were going to impose something on me."

But he said, "When you used to talk to me about the Person and work of Christ, I wanted nothing to do with that. Now I just want you to know that the Lord was pleased to grant me saving faith and I just wanted to tell you that seeds were planted on those airplane trips."

Participant: Praise God!

Bruce: Thirty years ago! You just don't know, men. And that means this. You've got to be more concerned about what the world thinks of the Person and work of Christ than what you think about yourself, because if you think about yourself, you're going to modify it. You're going to blow it up. You're going to do something that is going to be detrimental because you're going to manufacture something that may not be true. So just realize this—that we're always going to be successful because we have the chance to witness for Christ.

A lot of times people ask me, "How many people have you led to Christ?" The honest answer is none. I have been there and presided at their new birth. But I've never led anybody to Christ. Somebody else had planted that seed. I recognize that. Somebody else had watered that soil. I just happened to be there to be the one to do the harvesting. But I can't say that I led them to Christ. There is a whole process of the Holy Spirit working through a bunch of witnesses. We need to make sure that the world is more concerned about the Person and work of Christ than they are about us.

So Peter gives us a wonderful example of that. The Holy Spirit may call somebody else up to do the watering at a later date.

So don't feel that your testimony isn't exciting because you're not hooked on drugs or booze or whatever it may be—something dramatic in your life. The most powerful ones in my mind—and I want to celebrate and use the young men who are here—in my mind the most powerful testimonies are the testimonies of those who have been raised in Christian homes.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: I think that's the most powerful testimony we have, far more than a drug addict who has been converted.

Years ago when I was with FCA, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, I was asked if I would appear on "The 700 Club." So they sent me this thing to fill out. They wanted to know about my testimony. And they had about three pages. They wanted to hear my testimony. It had about three pages.

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My testimony was simply this. "I was raised in a Christian home, came to saving faith by my parents, and I'm a sinner saved by grace." It took about three lines. *(Laughter.)*

Two weeks later I got a note back which said, "We don't think your testimony is powerful enough to change anybody's life." *(Laughter.)* That was fine with me. I didn't want to go on the show anyway. *(Laughter.)* But that's what they said. Your testimony isn't powerful enough or significant enough.

And in my mind, friends, the most powerful testimony we can have is the fact that I was raised in a Christian home! That's the most powerful thing I can say because of my mother and father's influence in my life. And that's why I celebrate you young men being here with us today.

Participant: Because your testimony is going to be the greatest thing—that you were raised by a Christian dad.

Participant: Yep.

Bruce: By a man who loved the Father and loved the Son and loved the Holy Spirit, and he passed it on to you guys. So when you have a chance to give your testimony, make sure that you give it accurately. Mine was just that I was raised in a Christian home, came to saving faith through the ministry of my parents, and I'm a sinner saved by grace. I have nothing else to say.

Now I can give you a lot of examples of how the Lord has worked in my life. But if you want my personal testimony, that was my experience!

Participant: Yes.

Bruce: Somebody says, "Go into greater detail." But my experience was this. I wanted to go to the Naval Academy. I wanted to be an Admiral. So as a young man I knew the difference between an ally and an enemy.

Then I was reading one day in my own devotional one day in Romans 5:10, which says, "*If while we were God's enemies.*"

And I stopped right there and I went to my dad and I said, "Dad, am I an enemy of God?"

And what would you tell your son if he asked that question? "Am I an enemy of God?"

And I'll always be grateful for my father, because he said, "Yes, you are, in your unregenerate state."

"And I said, "I don't want to be."

He said, "Then read the rest of the verse."

You see, that was the means by which I experienced the Person and work of Christ. That's my experience.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: I can't elaborate on that, other than the fact that I'm so grateful for my father. And I think that the most powerful testimonies we can have, men, are those testimonies where we've been raised in Christian families. So men, thank you for coming. Guys, we're glad you're with us today.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: Yes, Ted?

Ted: Historically, if you look at church history, that has been the place where people come.

Bruce: Absolutely.

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Ted: You have faithful parents out of their faithful homes rearing faithful children. That's how the church grew.

Bruce: Absolutely.

Ted: Not through altar calls and crusades and things of this sort.

Bruce: Amen. Thank you, Ted. That's exactly right. The most powerful thing we can do is to raise godly children in our homes and tell of our own experiences. That's my experience.

Start with what God has done in your life. Tell of your own participation.

Next, Peter gives us another example. After you've told of your own participation, and you're dealing with the Person and work of Christ, he then gives us the model for the testimony of *divine confirmation*. That's verses 17 and 18.

The next thing Peter does after singling out his own personal experience with the supernatural events surrounding the events of Christ, is that he wants to confirm what he shared by citing the very words of God. He said, "*We ourselves heard this voice.*"

Now Peter was confirming the fact that Jesus is the Messiah. And they never doubted that fact afterwards because the words confirmed it.

The next thing you want to do is to confirm your conversion by the Scripture. Tell of your own personal experience. The next thing you want to do is to explain your conversion with the Scripture. Confirm your conversion using Scripture. Show or write Scriptures that confirm your coming to Christ. I just gave you mine and that was Romans 5:10. Take a look at that. Would you turn with me to Romans 5:10?

"For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life."

The second thing that you want to do that Peter models for us is this. After you tell of your personal experience of the work of the Holy Spirit leading you to Christ, you want to back it up with whatever appropriate Scriptures you can use. These are *your* verses. These are *your* experiences. They are not somebody else's. You have to validate it with the Scripture. You essentially want to tell them through the Scripture these things—why your outlook has changed, why your goals have changed, why your priorities have changed. You want to verify God's experience in your life through the Scripture to back it up so they will understand that this is not grounded in your feelings. It's grounded in God's word. And remember this. You're explaining and now you're confirming the hope that you have within you, and you're just backing it up with Scripture.

You don't need to have a whole lot of verses, guys. You don't need to have some significant plan to do the same thing every time. Remember this. God the Holy Spirit knows what is going on in that person's life. You don't know that. So just because your work has been successful with one person, you may not be able to use the same thing with somebody else. But you just want to have a plan that basically tells your own personal experience and have some related Scriptures which are going to confirm your conversion, however you can do that.

I'm not a big fan of going out to the airport and getting somebody off the plane—*(laughter)*—grabbing him and giving him the Four Spiritual Laws. I'm not a big fan of that because I don't know what's going on in that person's life. I've had too many people turned off by that.

You see, Peter is talking about this. Conduct precedes your conversation. What is it that makes it attractive so that they want to communicate with you about salvation in Christ? It's

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your conduct. It's your holy living. Doctrine precedes conduct. Conduct precedes conversation. That's the sequence that Peter models for us

Participant: Bruce, I think one of the problems we have too is that, as people, we tend to think that it's up to us to bring them to Christ.

Bruce: Right.

Participant: God uses us.

Bruce: That's right.

Participant: It's Him, not us.

Bruce: Remember, we're the witness. He's the power behind it. Now here's the way Warren Wiersbe, another theologian, describes witnessing for Christ. "If you have received Christ, you are a witness. It doesn't matter how much theology you know. The Holy Spirit will take what you say and make it accomplish what He wants."

Now that doesn't mean that we don't need to be theologically grounded. I'm not saying that. All I'm saying is that you don't need to be a theologian at the moment that somebody says, "Can you give me a reason for the hope that's within you?" You can talk of your personal experience and you can back it up and authenticate it with some Scripture.

If you think that you're inadequate, you're right. (*Laughter.*) If you think that He's inadequate, you're wrong. The Holy Spirit will take your inadequacy and He will make it adequate. Your responsibility is to say what you do know. At least you know this—that Jesus saved you, forgave your sins and put peace in your heart. If that's all you can say, the Holy Spirit will use it.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: You don't need to have a theological treatise to make sure that you are sharing your faith. Just tell your own personal experience. And when you can, validate that, confirm that with some Scripture.

It's important that you're able to confirm your Christianity Biblically so it's not just something where you're talking about your experience per se, but you're talking about the experience you've had through the Word and the Holy Spirit. They may all run together and that's okay. But don't stop with your experience. Confirm it with the Scripture.

You can say, "This is what I've experienced. This is why I know it is true, because of what I have experienced." And you can say, "I know this is true because I've experienced this from God in my life."

I began to realize after reading Romans 5:10 what the whole concept of reconciliation was about. I began to experience this over the years. After I gave my life to Christ, because of my father's question, he took me down to my pastor who explained the verse. He explained to me what reconciliation was. God had reconciled a severed relationship because of my sin. Now I can talk a lot about the reconciliation I've had over the years with God through the work of the Holy Spirit. So all I'm trying to do is to confirm my experience with the Scripture, saying that I know this is true because.

You've heard of that bumper sticker which says, "God said it. I believe it. Therefore it's true." It ought to say this. "God said it. It's true. Therefore I believe it."

Participant: Amen.

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Bruce: There's a difference. "God said it. I believe it." That doesn't make it true. What makes it true is that God said it.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: God said it. It's true. I believe it. That's how you want to follow that sequence.

So we go to the third principle of this testimony that Peter walks for us. And that would be *the testimony of divine revelation*—verses 19-21. Now Peter gives us another step and says that even though the personal experience that he described himself in the work of Christ, using the Scripture to confirm it, there's something else in his case that we must understand—the timing that's involved here. The apostles did not have the New Testament as we do today. And so therefore we can understand how the long line of prophetic Scriptures fulfilled by the life of Christ would be a mighty form of evidence for Peter's testimony. That's what he's referring to. He's referring to the Old Testament prophecies, saying, "This is true, because look at the prophecies of what happened." He's now using the Old Testament as the means of describing confirmation of the work of the Holy Spirit in his own life. That would be something that his people would understand because they did not have the New Testament as we do. Peter had seen signs and he had seen wonders. He'd been dazzled by visions and voices from heaven.

But nevertheless, even after considering all he says, "We have something more certain than my experience, and that is God's word." You then want to take people into the Scripture. Talk about your personal experience, and confirm your conversion with the Scripture. You then want to take them into the Scripture as much as you can. This is the great principle of how we apply the gospel to somebody else. We now talk to them about their saving faith or their lack of it. Do they understand the gospel?

So while we experience what is valid, the greatest tool that we have for witnessing is the word of God. We take people to the Scripture. And the reason is because it is the source of all the message. Peter wants us to know what he is telling them about how to live in Christ—verses 1-11—and that did not come about by human reasoning.

Notice verses 17-21. And that is what we have to do when we share Christ. Take people to the source of your message, the source of your experience. You take people to God through the Scripture.

Here's a perfect example. When I was pastoring my church in Illinois, I created a catechism for pre-school kids—pre-K up to third grade and then we went from third grade to seventh grade. There were two levels. The same questions; just different degrees of input.

Here was one of the questions we asked the senior group. I called this CADETS—Children and Adults Educational Training System. We just called the word CADETS and everyone was doing this in their homes. On Wednesday nights they would take these catechisms to the children and work through each of them. And then on Sunday night we had a worship service. We'd have the kids come up and we would examine them publicly in the form of their parents.

And so here is one of the questions we would ask. What do the Scriptures principally teach? A very basic question.

And the answer is what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man. Basic, simple questions. You see, that's what we were trying to do with our children—take them into the Scripture, let them see the validity of the Scripture. We had given testimonies of

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our own experiences with Christ. We had validated them and confirmed them with our own Scriptures. Now we were taking them into the Scripture.

That's exactly what Peter did when he was saying that he went back into the prophetic utterances, and he mentions this. Those are not just prophetic utterances by men who didn't make them up. Those are divinely inspired words of God. And so we need to take people into the Scripture as the final step.

So here are the three stages of witnessing that I believe Peter models for us. First of all, you want to explain your conversion. Make it personal. You want to confirm your conversion with Scripture. And then, thirdly, you want to confront them with their own conversion. Give them the gospel. And you want to especially talk to them about the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the Person and work of Christ, and repentance and faith. That's essentially why we would take them into the Scripture—the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the Person and work of Christ, and repentance and faith.

One of the best questions you can ask somebody after they've listened to your personal testimony and you've given them a reason for the hope that is in you and you've validated it by Scripture, would be something like this. What have you done with the Person and work of Christ? To make that transition, all you have to do is ask that question, because they have enough interest in you because they've seen something in you. What have they seen?

Participant: Christ.

Bruce: Conduct. They've seen holy living. That's why they confronted you and asked you the question in the first place. Conduct precedes communication. Something caught their attention because they asked you this question because of your conduct. Now you can have the conversation, and when possible, with the Holy Spirit leading you, you can ask them the question. What have you done with the Person and work of Christ?

Or another question you could ask them would be this. Who do you say Jesus is? That will give you an opportunity to take them into the Scripture and say, "Here is what the Scripture says." Let them argue with Scripture, not with you. Take them into the Scripture. Show them that Jesus is God's Son. It's only the Scripture which can do that. Let them argue with Him in the Scripture, not with you yourself. So the third stage is to take them into the Scripture.

And remember this from Romans chapter 1 verse 16. The gospel "*is the power of God for salvation to all who believe.*" The gospel is a powerful message, and we can take people and just ask them a simple question.

So basically, men, it means this. You and I have got to understand has implanted us with the divine life—chapter 1, verses 1-11. That life is going to call attention in some way or another so that people may come to you and ask a question. What is the reason for the hope that you have in you? How can you have hope in that situation? You want to be prepared to give an answer.

I think Peter gives us a good three-stage model, however that works out with you. This is not something where you're just going to make it a clone issue. It's something that gives you some thought patterns of how to go about witnessing for Christ. Tell your own experience. Confirm it with Scripture. And then take the people to the Scripture. Yes, please?

Participant: Is there any room for discussion about holy wrath?

Bruce: Absolutely.

Participant: You really have to know the type of person you're dealing with.

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Bruce: Well that's where you start talking about the holiness of God. That's the first thing you talk about. You talk about the holiness of God. Then you talk about the sinfulness of man. There's your contrast. There is a gap that exists between God's holiness and the sinfulness of man. And how is that gap filled? By the Person and work of Christ. And then the response to that is repentance and faith. That's a good sequence of how we present the gospel of Christ. We start with the holiness of God, then the sinfulness of man, then the person and work of Christ as the means by which that gap can be bridged. And then repentance and faith is the response of the person who hears the gospel. I believe Peter gives us a good example of that.

Well, men, I believe this very strongly because Peter taught us this—that your life makes your testimony believable. Your testimony explains how your life is hopeful. When you put those two things together—the believability of your own life and the hopefulness of the Scripture—you put those together and you have credible Christianity. Oftentimes we don't have credible Christianity because we start having conversations before we have conduct. Remember, the description of the divine life in verses 1-11 preceded these conversations about how we witness for Christ. Tell your personal story. Confirm it with Scripture. Then take people into the Scripture as a means of introducing them to the Person and work of Christ. That's what Peter reveals for us in chapter 1. It's a life of holiness and it's the explanation of our hope. Any questions? Does anybody want to add anything to this? Yes, Ted?

Ted: And, of course, I'm always concerned about how lousy my example is. I'm always surprised when people say something to me that is complimentary in my life. It always takes me by surprise.

Bruce: Well, that's not a bad thing. That's a good thing. I think it's a good thing. Remember, conduct precedes our conversation. And doctrine precedes our conduct. Doctrine precedes conduct; conduct precedes conversation. Yes, please?

Participant I always had a hard time and I'm still trying to grasp this myself about God's decision to kind of choose us and give us His grace, and essentially why some people fall. And I've tried to explain that to others and it's kind of a hard concept to grasp, you know.

Bruce: It's kind of hard to explain because it's kind of hard to grasp. It's unbelievable. *(Laughter.)*

Participant: Yes. You know, you don't want to scare people away sometimes. You just kind of—

Bruce: Sure. Charles Spurgeon and J. C. Ryle both say the same thing in different words. It's essentially this. You take people to the college of repentance and faith before you take them to the university of election and predestination. You don't start off with predestination. You start off with what?

Participant: Holiness.

Bruce: The holiness of God. That's where you start. You start with that. We have to give people the milk of the Word before you do the meat. And so you've got to be very careful. So we don't start talking about these theological smoke screens, because somebody is going to come up and say this when you're sharing Christ. And how often have you heard that? "That's not fair!"

Participant: Yes. Exactly right.

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Bruce: The real issue is what have you done with Christ? Those things are smoke screens. So you've got to be really careful that you don't start off with the deep theological things. That comes after your maturation in coming to Christ. And you disciple somebody and you stick with him and you help him grow in grace. Yes, Bishop?

Bishop Rodgers: What's fair is that nobody gets saved from before the foundation of the world.

Bruce: That's right. That's what's fair. Yes, sir?

Participant: I believe that my godly conduct has become more evident into my workplace from being in this Brave Men group and learning more and applying what we learn, and my boss taking notice of these things. And what that does in me is showing true growth and I respect you for that.

Bruce: That's a great testimony of why we're here. Conduct precedes conversation. Yes, please?

Participant: Where does joy fall in that sequence? I've found that people were almost more compelled to ask about our joy than our holiness. Are we actually commanded by Jesus to be joyful?

Bruce: Absolutely. Joy is the state of a person. Happiness is its expression of our joy, but joy is the state of the person. And what we express is our happiness. Certainly, they may come and say, "How can you be so joyful?" That's not the same thing as describing the hope that's within you. They may have different things that might appeal to you because of your conduct. They might not use the word *hope*. They may use the word *joy*. But it's the same issue. Peter says, "Be prepared to give an answer for the hope with in you."

But yes, we need to be joyful. Remember this. Joy is the condition of the soul. Happiness is the expression of it. Yes, please?

Participant: You've been dealing mainly with what seems to be one-to-one personal evangelism.

Bruce: Yes.

Participant: What about the use of a small group investigative Bible study? Do you have any thoughts about that?

Bruce: I have good thoughts. Yes, do it! And when you have it, and you know that they are not believers, there is going to be an introduction into the Scripture. You start off again with the holiness of God. Then you talk about the sinfulness of man, and talk about Jesus Christ who bridged that gap. You talk about the Person and work of Christ and then you talk about repentance and faith. That's a wonderful way of doing that in a small group. You can just make that very, very simple and have that be a wonderful, powerful expression of the gospel of Christ. Remember this. Romans 1:16-the gospel "*is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe.*"

When you're using it in a small group, the thing you have to be careful of is, don't let people go off on tangents. Too often, they'll say, "That's not fair!", or whatever they might say. "How can He do that?" You want to bring them back to this. "Well, first of all, let's talk about the Person and work of Christ." You don't want them to go off on tangents. The danger in a group like that is that somebody will not control it and they'll go off on some tangent and dominate the group. You just have to be wise enough not to let that happen. Anything else, men?

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Participant: Bruce?

Bruce: Sir?

Participant: Do you have any comments or thoughts on formal training, like Evangelism Explosion?

Bruce: No.

Participant: My experience has been that it’s hard to train people to be conversational in their faith. But I think that’s what you’re getting at. It’s more real to the person you’re talking to than. “Here I’ve got this memorized script and you need to sit down. Let me take you through it. And at the end I’m going to ask you to buy.” Any thoughts on programs like that?

Bruce: I’m not a real fan of those. I think it’s important to train people. That’s what I’m saying. But my experience has been such that you can’t take something and clone it to everybody else. The Holy Spirit’s work in a person’s life differently. You don’t know how that person is. You need to go back and forth and trust the Spirit. Yes, you need to be trained. So you can use Evangelism Explosion as a training mechanism. But you don’t go cloning that on everybody. That’s my point. It’s the point of application, not the point of training. We need all the training we can have. In my mind, it’s the inappropriate application of some of that which makes it difficult. Yes, Tom?

Tom: I think that too often in witnessing, people forget about personal relationship and connection. St. Clement in his essay, “Can the Rich Man Be Saved?”, concludes, “He can, if you become his friend.” You have to have a relationship so that the believer, rather than saying, “This is the truth. You must believe”—you know, it’s me taking something and putting it on you—it’s having a relationship there.

Bruce: Certainly having a relationship with the person is the reason that they’re going to ask about the joy and the hope that’s within you, because you’ve got a relationship with them.

Tom: Yes.

Bruce: That has to happen first. That’s why I’m not a big proponent of going to the airport and grabbing somebody off the plane just doing this (*hand motions*), and propping it up because there is no relationship there. Yes, please?

Participant: Bruce, I think it’s about that I’m not alone. (*Unclear.*) “*for which I have suffered, bound and chained as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound.*” It’s about Him, you know. It’s not about me. (*Unclear.*)

Bruce: It’s all over us.

Participant: Yes! Bring that out! Just the book of Romans here again—what a blessing!

Bruce: So men, you want to take people to the Scripture and let the person argue with the Scripture, not with you. So that means you have to be well versed enough, Sig, to be trained well enough to know, where I can take you to the Scripture and be mature enough not to let them go off on some tangent.

Now that may take some time. But Peter is basically saying that the very basics are these. Tell your personal experience. Confirm your conversion. Then take them through the Scripture. That’s essentially what he has been addressing us to do. Anything else? Yes, please?

Participant: On what Tom was saying about the personal relationships—and I believe that he was alluding to other people—when you know from Scripture that you have a personal relationship with Christ because of Him, when you develop that personal relationship, then you

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can begin because it flows from you with joy. I had it happen to me on Monday. A fellow had been asking me something. And I said, "I've prayed about it." And I gave him something on Wednesday.

And he said, "God talked to you?" I said, "Yeah, during my prayers yesterday morning. He told me what to give you," to lead him into Scripture. He's a very intellectual guy. It wasn't like talking to some of my other friends. *(Laughter.)* It don't mean that they're dumb. But he reads so much.

Bruce: Yes.

Participant: But that personal relationship.

Bruce: See, that's where it starts. You talk about your relationship to Christ, how He brought you to saving faith and you talk about that at a very personal level. And I know this is true because the Scripture says this. If I repent and believe, He will save me. I have that confirmation because the Scripture says it is true. Therefore I've experienced it. Yes, Bishop Rodgers?

Bishop Rodgers: Bruce, my problem was wanting to be the Admiral and being a Christian. I mean, I grew up in a Christian family. But somewhere in there, something happened that I can't figure out exactly where it happened.

Bruce: And that's okay. What's your story? There are many people who mirror that. That is almost mine. I mean, I grew up in a Christian home. You know, I did all the right things. But I wasn't saved at that point because there was a time when that particular verse really grabbed me. But don't worry about that. I think that's very, very normal. And so you may not be able to explain that, but just explain it the way you just did. Something happened. That's just the work of the Holy Spirit, which is affirmed by the Scripture. You can affirm that wonderfully through the Scripture. So I think that's very, very powerful what you just said, Bishop Rodgers.

But you may just not know the exact time. How often do we hear people say, "You need to put a stake in the ground and put the date on the day that you came to Christ." When somebody says, "How do you know you're a Christian?", you look back and see that stake in the ground. Well that may not be the case. You may not be able to define that.

But you know this. I'm a different person because my goals have changed. My conduct has changed. My character has changed. My whole life has changed. You can affirm that as much as you can because you've had the work of the Holy Spirit in you and you confirm that through the Scriptures. Yes, please?

Participant: Bruce, it makes me think of Paul calling timothy. He looked and looked and looked for the right guy to work with him. He says of timothy about the faith that is "*in your mother and in your grandmother;*" and he came to preach (*unclear.*)

Bruce: Right.

Participant: Because of that, he was such a special Christian.

Bruce: Exactly right. Good illustration. Remember this, men. It's your story. Yes, please?

Participant: I have a question. How do you approach people who use Christ's name in vain or God's name out of context? There is power in His name, and they're walking all over it. Isn't it our duty to approach them about that? Maybe the setting has so much to do with it, I guess. But I know a lot of it is coming out of Hollywood, this anti-Christian stuff today. But it's just very annoying if you're a heartfelt Christian.

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Bruce: Remember this. The first part of John 10:10 says this. *"The thief comes to steal and to kill and to destroy."* All of that is part of spiritual warfare. We are in the midst of spiritual warfare. I can't tell you what to do when someone sometimes uses the name of the Lord in vain. I can't tell you what to do. All I can say is that you've got to respond to what the Holy Spirit is doing in you.

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: I don't know. I can't give you a black and white answer. Now I've responded different ways to different people because of different situations. They may not always be the same. That's why you absolutely have to be trusting the Holy Spirit to move in your life to give you the aggressive response you need to have at that moment. That may be different the next time. You just can't do a carte blanche, black and white issue on those things. That's where you have to be walking by faith, not by sight. Okay?

Participant: Can you give us some examples of different ways you've responded to that?
(Unclear.)

Bruce: Well, there's a difference. If I know the people well, then I have a different response than I do if I don't know the person well. If I know the person well enough to know, I would just tell them, "You know, that expression offends me because He's my Savior." I've said that.

Now I can do that. I did that with my teammates because I knew them well enough, because we'd been through a lot of things. Now I may not say that to my boss at work because I may not know him or her that well. So you have to be very sensitive. It depends upon the relationship you have with how aggressive you can be.

The first time I had my first evaluation at PNC, when I was the senior vice-president, the man who hired me came in and said, "You know, I love what you're doing with your department. I've got one problem."

And I said, "What's that?"

And he said, "You don't cuss." (Laughter.) "And you don't swear."

Now I wanted to say, "No." (Hand motions.) (Laughter.) But I didn't. Now I didn't know him that well yet. So my response was something like this. "Well, if I have to use profanity to get my passion across, it says more about me than it does the rest of the group." Then we shook hands.

Participant: Bingo.

Bruce: That's all I said. If I have to use profanity to get my point across, it says more about me than it does the issue. Now after that, people would swear several times in the meetings like that with the Senior VP's and he would stop them. He stopped them, not me.

Participant: Wow!

Bruce: He was the one who said, "We shouldn't be talking like that."

Participant: Amen.

Bruce: "We just need to clean up our act." He made comments like that. But that's how it happened. I didn't throw Scripture at him because I did not know him well enough at that time. I had to point out that the issue became me and them. It was more about me than it was anything else. We have to be sensitive to that.

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Let the Holy Spirit lead us, men. We can't come up with a carte blanche answer for everything. Anything else?

Let's pray, guys. Father, we've had a wonderful discussion about how we can give Your life away. But first of all, Father, we need to be participants in the divine life. We need to be working on those seven character qualities so we will increase in the knowledge and the work of the Lord Jesus. May our conduct precede our conversation and may our doctrine precede our conduct. May it all be for God's glory, through the powerful name of Christ. And all the Brave Men said, "Amen." Thank you much. (*Applause.*)