



SUNDAY, APRIL 16, 2023

WATCH YOUR WITNESS

I CORINTHIANS 10:23-11:1

**A SERMON BY
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Date: April 16, 2023
Preacher: Rev. Dr. Howard-John Wesley
Sermon Title: Watch Your Witness
Scripture: I Cor. 10:23-11:1 (NIV and The Message Bible)

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive. No one should seek their own good, but the good of others. Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, for, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.” If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if someone says to you, “This has been offered in sacrifices,” then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience. I am referring to the other person’s conscience, not yours. For why is my freedom being judged by another’s conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for? So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God— even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

THE MESSAGE BIBLE

Looking at it one way, you could say, “Anything goes. Because of God’s immense generosity and grace, we don’t have to dissect and scrutinize every action to see if it will pass muster.” But the point is not to just get by. We want to live well, but our foremost efforts should be to help others live well. With that as a base to work from, common sense can take you the rest of the way. Eat anything sold at the butcher shop, for instance; you don’t have to run an “idolatry test” on every item. “The earth,” after all, “is God’s, and everything in it.” That “everything” certainly includes the leg of lamb in the butcher shop. If a nonbeliever invites you to dinner and you feel like going, go ahead and enjoy yourself; eat everything placed before you. It would be both bad manners and bad spirituality to cross-examine your host on the ethical purity of each course as it is served. On the other hand, if he goes out of his way to tell you that this or that was sacrificed to god or goddess so-and-so, you should pass. Even though you may be indifferent as to where it came from, he isn’t, and you don’t want to send mixed messages to him about who you are worshiping. But, except for these special cases, I’m not going to walk around on eggshells worrying about what small-minded people might say; I’m going to stride

free and easy, knowing what our large-minded Master has already said. If I eat what is served to me, grateful to God for what is on the table, how can I worry about what someone will say? I thanked God for it and he blessed it! So eat your meals heartily, not worrying about what others say about you—you're eating to God's glory, after all, not to please them. As a matter of fact, do everything that way, heartily and freely to God's glory. At the same time, don't be callous in your exercise of freedom, thoughtlessly stepping on the toes of those who aren't as free as you are. I try my best to be considerate of everyone's feelings in all these matters; I hope you will be, too. Follow me, because I'm following Christ.

SERMON SUMMARY

As he opens this sermon, Pastor Wesley reminds us that others are always watching how we behave. In fact, our public witness as Christians may be the determining factor in what someone else believes. We who profess Christ must “watch our witness.” What does it mean to witness? Some believe it is based on sharing the Bible or evangelizing, *but* our witness is rarely based on what we say. Our witness rises most powerfully out of what we show the world by our actions. Our witness as believers begins with understanding that what we show will affect how others believe.

This is what Paul points toward in his letter to the Church at Corinth. The people in Corinth had to learn to watch their witnesses because non-Christians were watching them to see what they would do. Because there is freedom in God, Paul teaches that we need not lead paranoid lives and constantly worry about being people pleasers. ***He also teaches that we must live knowing our influence on others is real.*** We must live caring about how our actions might impact another. Pastor Wesley reminds us just because we can do something—like eat meat sacrificed to idols—we may not always choose to do it ***if it could cause another to stumble.*** We are responsible for what our witness teaches others. We must not communicate mixed messages with our lives or our witness.

Pastor Wesley commended I Corinthians 10:31-32 as our memory verse: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks, or the church of God.” Based on this text, he reminds us there are at least three circumstances when we have to ask, “Are my actions glorifying God?” and “Am I causing anyone to stumble; when I am stressed, angry, or blessed?” May we watch our witness in each of these circumstances—and every moment of our lives so that God continues to receive all of the glory.

KEY POINTS

1. Someone is always watching how we behave, and our behavior may determine what that person believes.
2. God has a way of positioning and placing us in situations where our presence *and* practices impact and influence someone else's faith.
3. Sixty percent of church-going Christians never share their faith.
4. The work of Easter is to be a witness to the world.
5. Watch your witness; be aware of the power of your witness.
6. Christianity is not about what we have the *right* to do but what we have the *responsibility* to do.

Village Members and Facilitators:
The Curriculum Team does not expect you to cover all the questions.
We ask facilitators to choose the best questions for your Village from each section.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU QUESTIONS

1. We know that being a witness of Jesus Christ is an awesome responsibility. Share a time when you chose **not** to witness because you were stressed, angry, or blessed. What might you do differently if you could re-live that opportunity?

2. Please share a story of someone else's witness that blessed you.

INTO THE BIBLE QUESTIONS

1. Paul's letters were written to a specific audience, at a specific time, and for a specific purpose. How does this change what we glean from these writings today? How might we read Paul's letters differently, given we are reading someone else's ancient mail?

2. How did The Message Bible's paraphrase of I Corinthians 10 help you understand Paul's message differently?

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Can you share a time when you made a conscious decision to change your behavior because it may have caused someone else to stumble?

2. We are reminded that the work of Easter is to be a witness. However, Pastor said being a witness can get you reported to HR. How can you be a witness to others at work **or** in other non-church environments? Please remember that sometimes our witness has nothing to do with our words.

3. Pastor Wesley reminds us to be mindful of our witness when we have been blessed. Discuss how being blessed can have a negative effect on your witness.

4. Depending on the church culture where you came to faith, you may (or may not) know about the Prayer of Salvation. For your information, a version of it is in the resource section. If you met someone who did not know Jesus, **how and when** might you share this prayer?

5. What does Pastor Wesley's statement, "The majority of us are witness resistant, at worst, and hesitant, at best." mean to you? And what steps do you want to take to be less hesitant and resistant to sharing the gospel?

6. What does the phrase "glorify God" mean to you? How do you intentionally glorify God each day? If you cannot remember a time when you have glorified God, how will you change your witness going forward?

"CAN I PUSH IT?" QUESTIONS

1. The Tennessee 3 (Representatives Justin Jones, Gloria Johnson, and Justin Pearson) made headlines the last few weeks with their commitment to standing with their constituents against Tennessee's current gun laws. How would you describe their witness? Was it consistent with a Christian witness? Do you think their witness made an impact? How?

2. Where, in your opinion, is the witness of the Church absent? If it were present, what do you think would be different?

ACTIVITY

Research supports that many of us are “witness resistant” or “witness hesitant” because we are afraid we won’t know how to explain or defend our faith. If you were creating the “Ten Commandments of Witnessing,” what would be on your list?

SPIRIT WORK

Reflect upon a recent time when you’ve been stressed, angry, or blessed. List any mixed messages you may have sent. What will you do differently in the future to avoid sending mixed messages? Write a prayer asking God for forgiveness and direction in your future witness to others.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

Within the structure of Village, there are various affinity groups.

Each week the team creates questions specifically for these individual groups.

However, any village may draw from the questions listed below if the Spirit so moves.

For Married Couples

1. Marriage is a full-time job. Within a marriage, there is always someone watching your actions. Please share a time when anger, stress, or blessings caused you to “act outside of yourself” and offer a witness you did not want to portray to your spouse. What did you learn from that experience? What might you do differently if you could rewind the clock and re-live that moment?
2. Pastor Wesley notes that we all have a purpose and an assignment. As a married couple, how do you believe the witness of your marriage speaks to the world?

For Young Adults

1. During the time of turbulence on the plane, Pastor Wesley quipped that he prayed, “Lord, if you let this plane land, what I did yesterday I won’t do tomorrow.” Sometimes when we are in difficult circumstances, we pray “bargaining prayers.” Are there ways to shift our prayers so we learn to ask for wisdom instead of making bargains? How?
2. This sermon reminds us that our witness is not about what we say but what we show. Consider the last 48 hours. If you had spoken not a single word, what messages did your actions show? Give yourself a grade for the last 48 hours of your Christian witness.

For Parents

1. Think about your last difficult conversation with your child. Did it glorify God? How? Did it cause your child to stumble? How? Now that you have considered these questions, would you have shifted the conversation in any way?

2. The work of Easter is to be a witness to the world. In what ways do you witness to your child with your actions, not your words?

For Seniors

1. Do you know anyone who believes their age has earned them the right to say whatever they want? What message would you take from this sermon to share with them? How would you share it so you do not compromise your witness?

2. Now that you've talked about your "cousins," when have **you** used the privilege of age to speak in a way that did not glorify God and/or caused someone to stumble?

For Women

1. Human emotions are part of every one of us. Pastor Wesley quotes Ephesians 4:26-27, *Be angry and sin not*. How do we use our emotions, including anger, wisely when offering our witness to the world?

2. Pastor Wesley reminds us that we can rejoice even in stressful times. What are some “reasons to rejoice” that help strengthen your witness?

For Men

1. Pastor Wesley reminds us that God has a way of positioning and placing us in situations where our presence *and* practices impact and influence someone else’s faith. Whose actions impacted your life? Whose life have **your** actions impacted?
2. Pastor Wesley reminds us that we can rejoice even in stressful times. What are some “reasons to rejoice” that help strengthen your witness?

For Returning Citizens

1. As a returning citizen, do you find it easy or hard to witness the gospel of Jesus? Why? What encourages you to continue sharing the gospel?
2. Pastor Wesley notes that we all have a purpose and an assignment. As a returning citizen, how do you believe the witness of your life speaks to the world?

For Differently-Abled Persons/People

1. One's witness does not begin with what is said but is communicated by **actions**. Your life speaks, even when your mouth is closed. Think about the last 48 hours. How did your actions bear witness to the love and goodness of God? If you cannot think of anything, how do you want to be a witness this week?

2. Everyone's life is a witness. How is **your** life a witness before others? How do your different abilities give you a unique opportunity to share the gospel without using words?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. Prayer of Salvation
 - a. The Prayer of Salvation is a prayer based on Romans 10:9 (KJV), *"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."*
 - b. Typically a Prayer of Salvation contains these five elements: 1) a confession of sin, 2) a request for forgiveness, 3) a profession of faith in Jesus as the crucified and risen Lord, 4) an invitation for Jesus to come into our lives, and 5) a promise to follow Jesus.
 - c. A sample prayer of Salvation is, *Jesus, I know that I am a sinner, but I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe that You died for my sins and rose from the dead. I believe as I confess this, turn from my sins, and invite You to come into my heart that I will be saved. Lord, I receive You now and promise to follow You as my Lord and Savior. Amen.*

2. Sharing Your Faith Without Fear: A Biblical Strategy for Making Disciples
 - a. R. J. Waggoner is the author of this book quoted by Pastor Wesley during the sermon.