



## IS ANYONE ASKING YOU?

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*“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth.”*

You have been made in the image of God, with the capacity to bear His likeness. But, due to the influence of sin inside you and the pressures of the culture outside you, His likeness was as good as dead. You were without God and without hope in this world. Yet, every “aha” moment was an awakening of your capacity to know God.

And then the Gospel came—the Good News about Jesus Christ, God’s Son become our Savior, who brings us newness of life in God’s amazing grace to wash away our guilt and purge our shame. (Sucking a deep breath...) And we began to live!

And all that God has sown in you (the gifted person He made you to be) is waking up—beginning to breathe, beginning to see, beginning to hear, beginning to live.

You have been given this gift because God loves you. But He also loves every other human that He made. And now He wants you to help Him wake them up, too.

Reaching the world starts with you, right where you are—your relationships and the sphere of influence that God has given you.

I want to equip you with as many tools as I can, but I cannot give you everything you need. All that I offer is limited to my knowledge, understanding, and experience.

You yourself bring some things to the table that I lack. Growing in Christ is never just a matter of adding things from the outside that you do not have, but others do. Far more growth is measured by the release of things that God has already placed within you that are stuck, undeveloped, or unrecognized.

The Word of God (the Bible) unlocks those things, and the Holy Spirit breathes life into them. The Holy Spirit has been given to empower you—to energize your gifts and knowledge—for God’s use.

Are you willing to be used by God? Before you answer too quickly, pause and think: When you use a rag to mop up a spill, do you have to ask the rag's permission? Does the rag have to agree to the project? Must the rag enjoy being used? Does the rag benefit from being used?

Now, let me ask you again, Are you willing to be used by God? Of course, you are far more to God than an inanimate strip of cloth. But your usefulness in God's hand, does not depend on your pleasure, or your wise counsel about the project, or even that you know what the project is. Only that you're willing that He should use you to produce some fruit.

What you need most of all—in this very moment—is that the Holy Spirit empower you for the work. For apart from Him, you can do nothing useful, nothing fruitful.

You are called, and you can be equipped, but you must also be empowered.

### **Living in Babylon**

Daniel was a young Jerusalemite—a faithful man of God—who was taken in captivity to Babylon—a rich, powerful, and thoroughly heathen culture.

Daniel maintained his faith in God, his daily practice of faith, in spite of his surroundings. His faith was not produced by his surroundings; in fact, it was discouraged by his environment. But Daniel came into captivity as a believer. He carried his faith within him, and would not let it go.

His faith produced wisdom and tact, which Daniel exhibited in his daily functions, to the degree that he gained respect and admiration from his ungodly overseers. (Are you listening?)

Daniel served his God faithfully, and served his heathen leaders also, without compromise. Daniel did not flaunt his faith; he expressed it privately and lived it publicly.

When his disbelieving peers assailed him, Daniel maintained his faith, relying on God to keep him safe and give him victory.

We live in a sort of Babylon today. The controlling culture is not friendly toward the faithful, marginalizing us as irrelevant. But are we? Have we deserved that label?

Or, do we win them over by our graciousness and wise behavior? How should we do that?

### **Ready to Give**

The verse most apologists and apologetic ministries use to describe their work is 1 Peter 3:15 where Peter instructs believers to *"be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the*

*hope you possess.*" But the truth of the matter is that not many of us are being asked about the hope that we possess.

If not, why not?

Are you hopeful in the midst of the pandemic?

Are you hopeful in the midst of political unrest?

Are you hopeful in the midst of social injustice?

Are you hopeful in the midst of economic inflation?

Are you hopeful in the midst of international conflict?

Do you believe that God has answers for us, even if we don't yet know what they are? Do you express it? Are you demonstrating it? Or are you ENTANGLED by the events and attitudes of the culture? Have you lost your focus on the "things above?"

*Colossians 3:1 Therefore, if you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 3:2 Keep thinking about things above, not things on the earth, 3:3 for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*

(Two valuable instructions here: *Keep seeking* and *Keep thinking*. What you seek after and what you think about are determining factors for your future!)

How should a Christian respond to ill treatment, to verbal insults, or to marginalizing behavior?

In Peter's day, even more than during Daniel's captivity in Babylon, believers were subjected to severe oppressive treatment. Persecution was costly, sometimes deadly. Peter's thoughts were not penned from a remote cabin beside a tranquil lake, but from the dusty streets of Jerusalem, bustling with hungry merchants and hungrier beggars and harsh soldiers of the Roman army.

Let these facts help you to understand contextually why Peter's instruction was very appropriate then, why it is becoming increasingly appropriate today, and what kind of lifestyle will have friends asking us about the hope that we have within us.

Apostle Peter broke it down for us. Let's listen to how he described it (1 Peter 3:8-18):

*3:8 Finally, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, affectionate, compassionate, and humble.*

*3:9 Do not return evil for evil or insult for insult, but instead bless others because you were called to inherit a blessing.*

*3:10 For the one who wants to love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from uttering deceit. 3:11 And he must turn away from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. 3:12 For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and His ears are open to their prayer. But the Lord's face is against those who do evil. (Psalm 34:12-16)*

So, I guess we could add to *keep seeking* and *keep thinking* about the things above, *keep speaking* about them, too.

*3:13 For who is going to harm you if you are devoted to what is good? (not just abstractly, or in theory, but to what is good for them.) 3:14 But in fact, if you happen to suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. But do not be terrified of them or be shaken.*

Living in kindness and without fear, is the Christian lifestyle Peter commanded. It is just as necessary, and you are just as capable, to live without fear, as it to live with kindness. Think about that.

*3:15 But set Christ apart as Lord in your hearts and always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope you possess. 3:16 Yet do it with courtesy and respect, keeping a good conscience, so that those who slander your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame when they accuse you. 3:17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if God wills it, than for doing evil. 3:18 Because Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, to bring you to God, by being put to death in the flesh but by being made alive in the spirit.*

Be ready to give an answer—with courtesy and respect toward others. And with a good conscience toward God.

What will you talk about? The HOPE that you possess. Talk about the HOPE.

Churches and doctrines and rituals take a back seat (unless THAT is specifically what people are asking you about). Talk about the Hope.

## **The Hope You Possess**

That hope is Jesus Christ Himself!

*Matthew 12:21 His name will be the hope of all the world."*

*Ephesians 1:18 I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope He has given to those He called—His holy people who are His rich and glorious inheritance.*

*19 I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe Him. This is the same mighty power 20 that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms.*

Just look at the power of genuine HOPE!

*Romans 8:23 We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as His adopted children, including the new bodies He has promised us. 24 We were given this hope when we were saved.*

*Romans 15:4* **And the Scriptures give us hope and encouragement as we wait patiently for God's promises to be fulfilled.**

*2 Corinthians 3:12* **Therefore, since we have such a hope, we behave with great boldness.**

Hope gives us power to behave WITH GREAT BOLDNESS!

*1 Thessalonians 4:13* **So you will not grieve like people who have no hope.**

Hope gives us joy IN THE MIDST OF SORROW.

*Hebrews 6:11* **Our great desire is that you will keep on loving others as long as life lasts, in order to make certain that what you hope for will come true.**

Hope is made certain by ACTS OF CHRISTIAN LOVE.

*Hebrews 10:23* **Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep His promise.**

*Colossians 1:23* **Don't drift away from the hope you received when you heard the Good News.**

## **Create an Impression**

You create an impression when you interact with people – whether in person, by email, over the phone, or in a casual meeting.

The impression created is defined by others. It's not what you think is being communicated—it's what others perceive it to be. For better or worse, that's what matters.

It's this impression that creates friendships, sells products, influences behavior, and represents the values you cherish.

What was the impression created by Jesus? People referred to Him as the Good Shepherd, the Prince of Peace, the Bread of Life, and the Everlasting Father—because Jesus lived it out in plain view. He created a divine impression.

Do you remind people of Jesus? Do you leave impressions that point to Him? Can people tell you have been with Jesus? Ask Jesus to help you make an impression that is worthy of Him.

*Romans 15:13* **I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in Him. **Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.****