

WITNESSES TO THE WORLD

“I’ll hear that you are firmly united in spirit.” PHILIPPIANS 1:27 (NOG)

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-8 (MSG)

“If you’ve gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if His love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care—then do me a favor, agree with each other, love each other, and be deep-spirited friends.

Don’t push your way to the front. Don’t sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don’t be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.

Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of Himself. He had equal status with God but didn’t think so much of Himself that He had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all.

When the time came, He set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, He became human! Having become human, He stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process.

He didn’t claim special privileges. Instead, He lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.”

PHILIPPIANS 1:27 (NOG)

“Live as citizens who reflect the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come to see you or whether I stay away, I’ll hear all about you. I’ll hear that you are firmly united in spirit, united in fighting for the faith that the Good News brings.”

INTRODUCTION

Good morning, Citizens of the Kingdom! You do understand that there are privileges and responsibilities to go along with that honor, right?

Our citizenship isn’t only about our private faith. Jesus told us to make disciples of all nations. Christians are meant to impact the whole world!

Jesus is saving people in every tribe and from every nation, according to the Bible. It doesn’t stop with being saved! Redeemed people become a “kingdom and priests to serve our God,” (Revelation 5:9–10).

Did you ever wish you could make a big impression on people for the mission? I mean, did you ever want to cause people to become Christians? Did you ever want to teach them about Jesus and extend His love to them? How would you go about doing all those things?

Maybe you wanted to raise money for a great billboard for everyone to see. Do you think that would work? How would it read? You could be creative. Others have tried. Here are a few signs actually posted on highways:

- *Life is short. Eternity isn't. –God*
- *How will you spend eternity? Smoking or non-smoking?*
- *One day, each of us will face God, are you prepared? (posted on a highway next to a cemetery!)*
- *Be an organ donor. Give your heart to Jesus.*
- *You have one new friend request—from Jesus. Confirm or Ignore?*
- *God loves you and He approved this message.*

I guess these billboards and signs are well intentioned and they get noticed, but do they accomplish anything? At best, they are discussion starters.

But I ask you, how are Citizens of the Kingdom really supposed to serve God and be witnesses to the world? How is this possible? We want to care about our neighbors as well as those in all of the 128 countries where The Salvation Army is at work and beyond. How do we witness to others in such a way that we really accomplish something for God?

With such an important question on our hearts, we go back to the Bible for direction. Let's find out what Paul expected of the Philippian church, whose members he called "citizens of the Kingdom," and follow the direction he gave them. He said that he wanted to hear that they were "united in spirit." That is important. If we accept this direction today and work towards being "united in spirit," we will discover a vitally important key that will enable us to be witnesses to the world.

I. ACCEPT OUR MISSION STRATEGY

We know the words, "*For God so loved the world that He gave ...*" Yes, God's love has provided a plan of action to reach the world and we are partners in His plan. To help us, I want you to take a look at how the plan was revealed by Jesus in the prayer He prayed the night before He was arrested.

The hours remaining were so few. Jesus was praying to His Father and greatly concerned for His disciples. He knew the challenges they would face in the future, after He left them. First, He prayed for the disciples who were with Him. Then, He specifically prayed for those who would believe as a result of the ministry of the disciples, and all future believers. That's us! He knew that, after His resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Church would spread around the world and we would all be involved in the mission.

What if we could offer evidence to the world that God intercepted history in order to show His love and offer it to all people? This evidence would not be shared to win an argument or to outsmart someone who doesn't believe in God. It would be shared for their blessing and to provide a path for their redemption.

Here is the strategy; here is what works. Jesus' prayer was that all believers be brought to "complete unity." A demonstration of loving unity is the strategy. Jesus said, that the world would know that His disciples are loved by God (John 17:22–23) by observing their love for each other. That love would introduce God to people all around the world. It is attractive and potentially a life-giving discovery for others.

We don't have a truth detector to help skeptical or suffering people accept the love of God. But here is what we do have. As we worship Christ, believers are united in purpose and show genuine love for each other and

for those around them. It is genuine and stands in stark contrast to the angry and selfish attitudes prevalent in the world in which we live.

Colonel Rick Munn has shared these words, “A theme throughout Scripture is the global reconciliation plan of God. The image is one where a multitude ‘from every nation, tribe, people, and language’ stands before the throne. Christians find unity in Him, rather than in ethnicity. This counter-cultural force is great for an international army.”

This kind of unity becomes the billboard, the attraction, the secret to winning others. That is because it demonstrates God’s love to the world in a way that mere words cannot. Jesus said that this is the way to reach others. Now, that’s an amazing claim! It is unusual, special, and seldom seen. It needs to be demonstrated in our congregation. It is our witness to the world.

Jesus said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35). I challenge you to take this strategy to heart. Others can know about God’s love by observing us!

II. TAKE SPIRITUAL STEPS INTENTIONALLY

That strategy gives us the big picture. This demonstration of loving unity has to start at home, in our own hearts. Right?

Face it, you are not going to be able to demonstrate this kind of unity unless something good is happening in your spiritual life. Resentment and bitterness and memories of hurts from the past can rise up in our thoughts and show up in our behavior. If it does, it will interfere with our witness to the world.

It is no surprise then, that the Bible takes human tendencies seriously. In Ephesians 4:3–6 (MSG) the Christian is told to be “... steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences, and quick at mending fences. You were all called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly. Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness.”

How are we doing? How believable is our witness? I have three questions for you.

First, how quick have you been at mending fences? Are there any issues that need to be resolved here today? Are you willing to do something about them? Is there any bitterness that you need to let go of today? If you do, that is a good and intentional spiritual step.

Second, are you willing to work with others to carry out the mission and be a witness to the world? Have you figured out how to work with other people? Do you care who gets the recognition?

Dean Smith, a basketball coach, shared a great lesson. He required players on his team who scored baskets to thank the person who passed the ball to them.

Sounds like a good spiritual lesson, being willing to recognize other people who help in the ministry. You need to accept that you are not an independent Christian, you work with others, each person with different abilities, but all with the same purpose.

Third, are you willing to do work that may not be noticed, but contributes to our mission?

After the resurrection, Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me?” When Peter said he did, Jesus simply said to him, “feed my sheep,” meaning take care of my people. What if you are asked to donate money to a work

happening in another country? The people living there will never know what you have done. It's a matter of you hearing Jesus say, "feed my sheep" and then you being intentional regarding your response. It is about understanding that, in God's eyes, this is a way you can be a witness to the world. This is enough for Citizens of the Kingdom.

III. DO GOD'S WORK FAITHFULLY

We have a strategy that is key in reaching the world and we have a personal challenge to be spiritually healthy. Are you ready to work together to do God's work faithfully?

In the business world, we have insights from successful people. Businessman and inventor, Henry Ford, made a lot of sense. He said, "Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success."

What keeps you moving forward with Christians so you can be an effective witnesses? Is it personal prayer, your devotional life, sharing your testimony, seeing the working of the Holy Spirit as you gather with other Christians? Is it the God-given talents you share, giving generously of your time and money? All of these are part of a healthy and growing relationship with God. So, can you say that you are ready to do God's work faithfully?

Sometimes you just have to stick with something when you don't feel like it. Did you pay your taxes? Strange question you may think, but a good illustration. After all, your taxes are due every year and you can't ignore this obligation. There are forms to fill out and there will always be another year's obligation to meet in the future.

Do you remember when someone asked Jesus about paying taxes and in response he requested that a coin be brought to Him? What did He say? He asked, "whose likeness is on the coin?" The people answered, "Caesar's." His response was, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17 KJV).

You don't argue with the IRS about paying taxes, it is required. But did you ever try to think about what is expected when you "render to God the things that are God's?" Consider this, God's work goes forward and for a Citizen of the Kingdom, there is no question— it must be done.

There are many examples of people who have served the Lord faithfully. You know them. Does that describe you?

Here is one such example. Before he was promoted to Glory, Corps Sergeant Major George Krider of the Cincinnati (Citadel), Ohio Corps was awarded the Order Of The Founder, the Salvation Army's highest honor. He gave outstanding service as a soldier and local officer for 50 years, despite being physically disabled in his teens. When people saw him, they did not think about the crutches that were his constant companions, they just thought of him as a man of God. In fact, he encouraged 30 young people to become Salvation Army officers. What an impact! He loved people, worked with them effectively, and did God's work faithfully.

What is your story?

Remember what Paul expected of the citizens of the Kingdom in Philippi. He said, "I'll hear that you are firmly united in spirit." Are we? Our unity is a witness to the world, a difference maker. Our unity gives evidence to the world of the reality of God's presence. Jesus prayed, "May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me," (John 17:23 NLT).

You are a Citizen of the Kingdom. You are called to be a witness to the world. How Christians represent God to the world makes a difference. Being a witness to the world is possible, but to accomplish this in your life, you are called to be faithful.

General John Gowans helped us understand our ministry; he said we were to “save souls, grow saints, and serve suffering humanity.” This excellent description of our mission may keep us on target with our mission. As a Citizen of the Kingdom, you realize that people are the object of each of these parts of our ministry. You are called to faithfully serve people. In this way you are a witness to the world.

And by the way, as you seek to reach others with the Good News, you don’t have to be amazing and slick in your presentation. You need to be faithful. You need to demonstrate that you are part of a faithful group that is not afraid to talk about love and joy, life and death, forgiveness and peace. These are all part of the everyday life of a Citizen of the Kingdom that others will find attractive.

APPLICATION

Did you ever wish you could make a big impression on others for God’s mission? I mean, did you ever want to cause others to become Christians? Did you ever want to do something to teach others about Jesus and share His love with them? Fulfilling our privileges and responsibilities as Citizens of the Kingdom makes it possible.

Remember, Paul longed to hear that the Church was “united in spirit.” Today, if we are to send that kind of message to our community, it will be up to all of us. We are the billboards people will observe that advertise Jesus. In this way, sharing the Good News is possible.

Remember, your love of Christ and of fellow Christians is God’s strategy for giving the world evidence of His love. It requires you to be faithful.

So I ask you, are you a joyful witness to the world of the love of God?

PRAYER CHORUS

582/609 “Father, We Love You”

SONG

938/394 “We Have Caught the Vision Splendid”

TELLING OTHER PEOPLE ABOUT JESUS

(Witnesses to the World)

PREPARATION

Have a cell phone with emojis available. Even better, print out some examples of emojis so the children (and adults) can easily see them and respond.

INVITE THE CHILDREN TO GATHER

Sing the chorus:

*Jesus loves the little children
All the children of the world
Red and yellow, black or white
They're all precious in His sight
Jesus loves the little children of the world*

Do you ever wish you could tell everyone about Jesus, all around the world?

How do you tell other people what you are feeling?

Some people send messages to each other and include emojis. What is an emoji?

(Allow for answers.)

It is a small picture of a face that you choose to show how you are feeling. Have you ever seen one? Let's see if you can make your face match an emoji.

Let's see who can make yourself look like some of these emojis: Happy, surprised, smiley, angry, dizzy, blowing a kiss, cold, loving, praying, heart.

Good job. Now, how can we tell children all over the world, most, at whom who have never even seen an emoji, that we love them?

One way is to invite children who live nearby to come to our Sunday school. For kids we haven't met, we can pray for them when we hear their stories. We can give to our World Services fund raising because a lot of the money helps children's program all around the world.

In the country of India, many children need a place to live. So, The Salvation Army helps them by providing homes and education. Sixty young girls live in the Eluru Girls' Hostel in one of our Partner in Mission territories called India Central. A person who helps the girls said, "While the children in the hostel do not have many material possessions, the smiles on their faces show the joy that they have in their hearts."

We are glad that they are getting help. When we hear about their smiles, we are happy too. We can have a smiley and a heart emoji of our own just by thinking that these children got to hear about Jesus and that He loves them.